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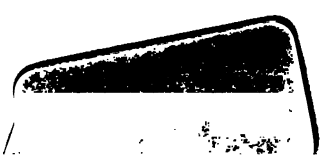
The Model Life

by the
Rev. Dr. Wallace



The Model Life.

THE

MODEL LIFE,

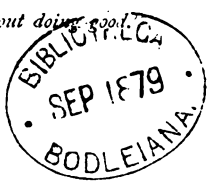
And other Discourses.

BY THE

REV. ALEXANDER WALLACE, D.D.

AUTHOR OF "THE CLOUDS OF THE BIBLE," ETC., ETC.

"*Jesus of Nazareth who went about doing good.*"



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THE MODEL LIFE.

Part First.

HOW very brief are the biographies of the Bible! Take this as an instance:—"Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him." This is all that is said of a long life of the most distinguished piety. These few words place the man before us in the fragmentary records of the far past, where he shines alone in the darkness, like a solitary star gleaming brightly on the forehead of the night. His is a light that will never fade away.

In like manner the text contains the sublime and simple record of the Saviour's life, in five little words full of moral beauty, grandeur, tenderness, and power. Of all that has been said of His excellence, and of His varied efforts for the good of man, this statement may be regarded as the noblest monument which the Eternal Spirit has reared to commemorate divine goodness and worth, as exhibited in that wondrous life, where the glory of God was veiled in the frail covering of human flesh. Where can the world find one inscription from any tomb of its departed heroes that will bear a moment's comparison with these words, which might have been inscribed on the cross or on the sepulchre of Jesus?

Partial friendship often exaggerates the virtues of

the departed; and the eulogium on the page of the historian, and the epitaph on the "storied urn," are often sadly out of harmony with what was the real character of the past life. It is far otherwise with the earthly career of Jesus, and the highest praise He ever received from any of His friends.

> "O, for a thousand tongues to sing
> My great Redeemer's praise!"

But, even then, His life and His love would be far beyond the reach of all that the warmest friendship could say or sing in their behalf.

When that distinguished philosopher and statesman, Sir James Mackintosh, was on his death-bed, the words of the text were often in his mind. His daughter, in her deeply-interesting memoir of her father, says:—"I one day read to him the twenty-ninth chapter of Job, which affected him to tears. At another time he told me that, during the many sleepless nights he passed, the contemplation of the character of Jesus Christ, and thoughts concerning the Gospel, were his chief occupation. He spoke of the delight he had in dwelling upon His noble character. I have heard his voice falter as he repeated, 'He went about doing good.' I said to him at one time, 'Jesus Christ loves you.' He answered slowly and pausing between each word, 'Jesus Christ—love—the same thing!' He uttered these words with a most sweet smile. After a long silence he said, 'I believe.' We said, in a voice of inquiry, 'In God?' He answered, 'In Jesus.' He spoke but once after this. Upon our

inquiring how he felt, he said he was happy." Whatever were the previous doubts as to the divinity of our Lord which threw their shadows over this highly-gifted soul, these seem to have been all removed before his death; and it appears from the daughter's narrative that this verse was greatly blessed by the divine Spirit, in bringing him into full light and peace.

The point, therefore, from which we start, in the illustration of the text, is the Divinity of Christ. This is the key which explains the whole of that marvellous career of love to which the world owes so much.

I. "*He went about doing good,*" *because* "*He was God manifest in the flesh.*"

Any survey of the life of Christ from a lower point of view cannot possibly reconcile its different parts, or do justice to it as a whole. "God is love," and the life of Jesus upon earth was the brightest manifestation of this love, because that life was God on earth in our nature. That love, which is at once the most endearing name and attribute of the Father, was now seen glowing in a human breast—"the man Christ Jesus;" beaming from a human eye; breathed from mortal lips in every word that He spoke; expressed in every look of pity or of sorrow; and in every act of healing, till on the cross that love of the Father, enshrined in the bosom of Jesus, could neither sound a lower depth nor scale a grander height, and the divine Sufferer said, "It is finished." The world had never seen such a life; it could form no conception of it whatever, and

for this reason,—it was goodness itself. Yea, it was God manifest in our nature, for "the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth."

II. "*He went about doing good,*" *as the one great aim of His life.*

"My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work;" "I must work the works of him that sent me while it is day;" "The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?" These are a few expressions from the lips of the Saviour in proof of the all-consuming zeal with which He began and carried on His life-work of love. Animated by the love that dwelt in the bosom of the Father from all eternity, and breathing this as the element in which He lived and moved and had His being, His mission of mercy in caring and providing for the bodies and the souls of men, in healing their spiritual maladies and redressing all their social wrongs, was the supreme object on which He had set His whole heart, and to which He devoted His entire energy. He had looked forward to it with delight from the depths of a past eternity. With an intense eagerness, satisfaction, and joy which fall within the range of no human experience, He brought it to a close for the weal of mankind and the glory of God the Father.

The painter or the sculptor gives himself up to days and nights of arduous, patient labour, it may be

for years, over some favourite piece of art; his soul is inspired, cheered, sustained by the motives which his own genius and the art which he worships supply. The philanthropist pursues his scheme for the amelioration of human misery with an intensity that brooks no delay, with an all-absorbing interest which robs him of his sleep by night and fills all his waking thoughts by day. But what is all this devotion to an earthly object compared with the divine intensity of Christ in the prosecution of His life-work, and that, in the midst of perishing multitudes? His life-work was not that of delineating the human form on the glowing canvas, or the breathing marble, till the soul of beauty beams from every feature, but the work of bringing back a lost and alien world to peace, of reproducing the divine life and the divine image in the soul of man—not a mere work of fancy, but of faith, not a mere display of genius, but of goodness, not the redressing of a wrong, or the lessening of human suffering, but nothing short of a new creation in the soul that was dark and dead, and sunk in trespasses and in sins. Grieved as He must have been by the many various elements of evil that environed Him and constantly bowed Him down in sorrow, yet with what unflagging zeal and fervent love did He pursue His life-work of doing good as the one great aim for which He lived! He did so, not because it gratified any personal motive or selfish feeling, for of this He had none; not because the God of love has associated happy emotions with the consciousness that we have benefited our fellow-men, but

because His nature, His intensest desire was to do good to the bodies and the souls of men.

He was not taught or constrained in any way to this life of true goodness, as we must all be by a power out of ourselves; such a life was His true element, the proper outcome of His own loving heart. It was as natural for Him to be good and to do good, as it is for the sun to shine, or for the bird to pour its sweetest notes of song over the budding months of spring. To do good was the law of His being; He could live for nothing else. There is no other way of accounting for such a life apart from the divinity of love. His whole life was bathed in it, yea, it was His very life itself. What other aim then could He possibly have had, but to do the will of His Father, and to finish His work; to be the Helper of the helpless, and the Saviour of the lost? For this cause He came into the world, and sooner could the sun have ceased to shine, or the deep broad river, fed from a thousand streams, to flow—sooner could the earth have ceased to yield its fruit, when the balmy breath of spring and the genial sunshine and shower revive it, than the Saviour's heart could have ceased to beat in warmest sympathy for the wrongs, the sins, the sorrows of men, or the deep current of goodness, expansive and exhaustless as His own love, could have ceased to pour forth its tide of blessing.

His one grand aim in life was ever before Him, in sunshine or in storm, in weal or in woe, in grief or in gladness, in the house or by the way, in the lonely dwellings thinly scattered amongst the mountains,

or in the fishing villages that dotted the margin of that beautiful lake which witnessed so many of His works of healing, whose waters He hushed and laid to rest, and on the bosom of which He had walked to the help of the disciples in the storm. Nothing could turn Him from His one great aim in life, to do good, either in the house of Mary at Bethany, or in the temple at Jerusalem, on the mountain where He prayed, on the lone sea-shore, or on the crowded streets of the city; when He taught in the fisherman's boat, or in Peter's house; in His mountain-home at Nazareth, where He dignified human toil by labouring with His own hands, and throughout the whole of His brief, beautiful, and blissful ministry of love, at all times and in all circumstances did our Lord pursue His mission of mercy, thus showing us how every department of life and labour may be pervaded by His own spirit of true goodness.

III. "*He went about doing good*," *with a constancy and devotion that never failed, even in the face of the greatest opposition.*

In a moral point of view it may be said that our Lord was the most sensitive being that ever appeared in this world, and this must have constantly laid Him open to the sharpest sufferings; for His spotless, sensitive, shrinking nature was brought into daily contact with sin, and with all the rough forces of evil in their most appalling and revolting forms. It is said of Lot, notwithstanding all his many imperfec-

tions, that his righteous soul was vexed from day to day, by the high-handed wickedness of the ungodly dwellers in Sodom; and the Psalmist more than once expressed his earnest desire to escape from the scenes of wickedness that oppressed his soul. What an avenue to the keenest sufferings this moral sensitiveness must have been to our blessed Lord! Amid what wearing out and thwarting influences so trying to any pure and generous spirit; amid what blindness, bigotry and prejudice, and open and concealed attempts even upon His life, He went about doing good, in spite of all scorn, insult, ingratitude, and all the reckless opposition of the foes whom He came to bless. Onward in the path of mercy did He move,—though His own townsmen would have thrown Him over the brow of the hill on which their city was built,—though the Pharisees and the Herodians took counsel on another occasion to put Him to death, because He had healed a man with a withered hand on the Sabbath-day; and again, because He had cured a poor, infirm and friendless cripple, who had borne the burden of an incurable palsy for thirty-eight long years. On He went, not merely with the unflinching firmness of a hero, but with the love and the patience, the calmness and the endurance of God. This was the spirit in which He pursued His life-work, though for the healing of a blind man, who had never gazed on the face of Nature, He was condemned as a Sabbath-breaker, though He was deserted by those on whom He had conferred the most signal blessings, and though the dark shadow of the traitor's presence

followed Him throughout the whole of His blissful ministry on earth.

His pure precepts and sublime doctrines were cavilled at, willingly perverted, and misunderstood; His mission altogether misinterpreted; His works of healing disbelieved, or, in the spirit of utter contempt, traced to Satanic agency; His reputation assailed, and His heart cruelly wounded; His love despised, and the most hateful epithets heaped upon Him, such as, "He hath a devil and is mad, a Nazarene, a gluttonous man, a wine-bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners." Notwithstanding all this hostility, He continued with unabated ardour, and, if possible, with ever-increasing solicitude and tenderness, to bless, though in the effort He should be cursed; to heal, though He should be torn; to bind up, though He should be broken; to save, though He should be destroyed. His goodness, moving amid the dark elements of evil, was like the sunshine kissing the thunder-cloud ready to burst, or laughing into beauty the dark, foaming torrent of the mountain, which threatens to sweep away everything in its destructive course. Surely if any one could have reasonably withdrawn Himself from man, Jesus might. There is nothing that will dispirit the most devoted philanthropist, that will sooner paralyse his efforts, and lead him to quit the field of benevolent exertion in despair, than combined opposition and base ingratitude on the part of those for whom he is uttering his most fervent prayers, taxing his physical and spiritual energies to their utmost degree of tension,

and for whom he is spending his life's best blood. Yet how terrible is goodness, even to those who hate it! The enemies of Jesus, at times, stood abashed amid its attractive yet awful lustre. Even Herod, the king, when conscience-smitten, could not withstand its power. His own disciples must have felt humbled and rebuked when, on being refused admittance into a village of the Samaritans, they asked Him to bring fire down from heaven to consume it, and He replied, "Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of."

He prayed and taught and healed, and wielded the powers of nature to convince His gainsaying countrymen, and He did so night and day, till He was utterly rejected. He stood, with His heart full of love and His hands full of blessings, till His "locks were wet with the dews of the night."

What a study that face is in that remarkable picture by Holman Hunt, "Christ the Light of the World"! There He stands, with the thorny crown on His bleeding brow, at the door of the sinner's heart, which has been firmly closed against Him, and all overgrown with noxious weeds. One hand is on the knocker, and you can almost fancy you hear that loving knock sounding through the silence of the night. The other hand is bearing the light that would guide the sinner's feet into the way of peace. And so He passed on from door to door, in the days of His flesh, and found many closed against Him. He is doing so still. He is passing from door to door, from heart to heart, in the message of the gospel—in the strivings of His spirit. "Behold, I stand at the

door and knock!" Open—open now, and receive Christ as a personal friend and Saviour—the gift of God for eternal life!

There is nothing I know of in this world that may be compared to the unflinching constancy of the Saviour's love. If we might indeed venture to name anything along with it, in the way of comparison, it would be the deep, pure, strong love of a mother's heart, fondly cherished even in the midst of every form of provocation, ingratitude, and neglect? That prodigal boy may break her heart, but he cannot quench her love. No! she loves him still. And yet, after all, the fondest mother may forget, but Christ never. "Having loved His own that were in the world, He loved them unto the end." Many waters could not quench His love, nor floods drown it. Neither the hatred of men nor the spite of devils could stop Him in His career of doing good. They made Him a man of sorrows; and whose sorrows were like unto His? And yet amid all these,—there must have been frequent intervals of joy and high and holy satisfaction, when the blind received their sight, the lame walked, the lepers were cleansed, the deaf were made to hear, the dead were raised up,—when He preached the Gospel to the poor, and they became rich in faith and heirs of the promises—when He brought deliverance to the captives, the recovering of sight to the blind—when He set at liberty them that were bruised, and the tongue of the dumb was made to sing, and the lame man to leap for joy.

When He could do nothing more to commend the

love of God to those who would not receive Him, He wept over the city that had doomed itself to destruction by its own unbelief. And yet His works of healing did not stop here, for when He had reached the very close of His life, and when Herod sought to put Him to death He uttered the memorable words, "Go ye and tell that fox, Behold I cast out devils, and I do cures to-day and to-morrow, and the third day, I shall be perfected."

Healing to the last in spite of all opposition! Yes! to the last; even the Garden of Gethsemane was not without its deed of mercy. When nailed to the accursed tree, and when His feet could move no longer on errands of love, for the hour had now come when He would passively submit to all that His enemies could inflict, His tongue was free to speak, and He prayed for the reviling crowd tossed with angry passions around the cross, who embittered His last moments with taunts and sneers—"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do!"

Nor amid all His own sufferings was His widowed mother forgotten, when she stood at the cross pierced through with many sorrows. The memorable words which He uttered on that occasion, as He committed her to the care of the beloved disciple, have invested filial affection with a moral beauty and grandeur unknown before.

And last, not least. No! perhaps the greatest act of healing that marked His wondrous career was in connection with the penitent thief dying by His side, when in divine pity He plucked him at the eleventh

hour of a miserably wasted, wicked life from the very jaws of hell. Was His last act of mercy on the cross not the greatest, when He took the prey from the mighty and the captive from the strong one, and the soul that was on the very brink of perdition was rescued as the first trophy of victory won upon the cross—the first fruits of the great harvest to be gathered into the paradise above?

IV. *He went about doing good to all without exception.* All were welcome to share in His sympathy and receive His healing. His goodness was like the light of the sun, from which nothing is hidden, which falls with as much gladness upon the fondly cherished flower in the window of the poor man's dwelling, as upon the richest, rarest plants in the garden of wealth; which brightens into beauty the white-washed gable end of the lowly moorland cottage, standing out alone,

"Beneath the shelter of an aged tree,"

as well as the turrets of the lordly mansion; which flashes its radiance over the rippling stream, and the arching willow and hazel that bend over it, as well as on the broad river, and the stately ships it is bearing onwards to the ocean.

Or to take another illustration from a different object in Nature. Like the stream that loves to linger amid its village homes, nestled amid the shadows of mountains, and the embowering foliage of ancestral trees, where there is little to disturb the even tenor of daily life, it was the special delight of

our blessed Lord to move amongst the homes of the poor and the lowly, and pour the riches of His grace around their humble dwellings. But like the rill that will not rest from the moment it bursts on its way, but travels onwards to the sea in ever widening course, and passes on through quiet villages and sweet homesteads till it becomes a great river, bearing on its bosom the mart of nations, the blessings of commerce, and making everything glad and beautiful where it flows, the stream of divine goodness in the life of Jesus, beginning first in the mountain home at Nazareth, amid the village retreats of Galilee, went forth from that seclusion to carry its rich dower of blessings to villages, towns, and cities, and to pour its treasures at the feet of all classes and conditions of men. He was free to all as the light of the sun, the air of heaven, the waters of the deep broad river. His sympathies for man and all his concerns were strong, pure, enduring.

No one ever cherished a more passionate and intense desire for communion with Nature in all its varied aspects, than Jesus did. Who in His days resorted more frequently to the hill sides and the secluded nooks of His country for solitary musing or for prayer? But often as we find Him on the lone mountain where He loved to retire at the close of the day, when His spirit was weary and vexed with the sins and sorrows of the city, we never find Him shutting Himself out from the great interests of humanity; for if the close of a sorrowful and toilsome day finds Him returning to some one or other of the many quiet spots not far off, it is only for a short season.

With the morning sun He is again on His walks of mercy, surrounded either by the famished, the sick, or the sad. His feelings were the very reverse of those expressed by the poet, in the words—

"I love not man the less, but Nature more."

His works of healing were not confined to one place; He passed through all the towns and villages of the country. He did not wait till the sufferers came to Him, He went to them. Nor were these deeds of mercy confined to any special period of His public life, for it is probable that not a day passed without being marked by some act of healing. How impressive must have been that scene, for example, when, at the close of a Sabbath day in Capernaum, and when the setting sun was throwing its golden radiance over mountain, lake, and river, over hamlet, town, and city, "All they that had any sick with divers diseases brought them unto him, and he laid his hands on every one of them and healed them." Next morning when the sun arose there was at least one city upon this earth entirely free from disease. The Lord was there in all His power to heal.

Could we group together the objects of Christ's healing power before He spoke the word which was as life from the dead, we would find that it extended to every form of disease that preys upon the body and the soul of man, and that it was ever bestowed upon all suffering ones who sought His help. What a picture it would make, could such a group be transferred to the canvas! There would be the cripple,

helpless as infancy; the blind, to whom the face of Nature was a mystery, or to whom it had long been a universal blank, and every one of whom might have said—

> "Thus with the year
> Seasons return; but not to me returns
> Day, or the sweet approach of even or morn,
> Or sight of vernal bloom, or summer's rose,
> Or flocks, or herds, or human face divine;
> But cloud instead and ever-during dark surrounds me!"

There would be the leper, banished from the pale of society, a lonely sufferer, compelled to utter the word of warning to everyone that approached—"Unclean! unclean!" There would be the deaf and dumb, separated from all living humanity as if by an impassable gulf; men and women who had never heard the harmony of sweet sounds, the murmur of the ocean, the roar of the tempest, or the morning song of birds. There would be the shattered and trembling paralytic, a very mockery of the human form divine; and, worst of all, demoniac frenzy, moping melancholy, when the spirit of man was the prey and the sport of the Spirit of Darkness! And in the midst of this group of sufferers stands the Great Physician, with face of melting pity, and with hands full of blessings, and He heals them all. "As many as touched him were made whole." O for that touch of faith, the response to which is ever given in healing power to soul, body, and spirit!

One beautiful picture before leaving this part of my subject. The day has come when He must bid His followers farewell. They walk in earnest

converse along the road leading from Jerusalem to Bethany, a pathway which Jesus had often trodden, and a village in which He had frequently enjoyed the sweet confidings of mutual friendship in the happy home of Mary and Martha, and their brother Lazarus. The slopes of Mount Olivet are at last reached, and here, in view of many sacred places that had witnessed His works of healing, He lifted up His hands, and, stretching them over His few wondering followers, blessed them with all the fervour of His loving soul. With the words of benediction still flowing from His lips, purifying the very air around them, and the spot which had been so lately the scene of His agony, He ascended on the breath of His own blessing and on the wings of His own love to the land where "one unbounded spring encircles all"—to the home of every pure affection and glorified spirit—to the upper sanctuary of peace!

"And when Thou didst arise, Thou didst not stand
With devastation in Thy red right-hand,
Plaguing the guilty city's murtherous crew;
But Thou didst haste to meet
Thy mother's coming feet,
And bear the words of peace unto the faithful few:
Then calmly, slowly didst Thou rise
Into Thy native skies,
Thy human form dissolved on high
Into its own radiancy."

Part Second.

V. *He went about doing good by His instructions, as well as by His works of healing.*

These miracles live in history as great, godlike facts —His words live in the heart, and by sanctifying the inner, bless and dignify the outer, life. From the moment these teachings were uttered, on till the present hour, they have effected a mighty change for good in the heart of humanity, wherever they have been known, and still in the words which He spake will Jesus go forth in all ages doing good, healing the social and spiritual wrongs of the world, and leading the bruised, the captive, the blind to the source of all healing. He could not utter the invitation, "Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest," without relieving some sin-burdened soul; He could not speak of the lilies of the field, of the fowls of the air, without leading some perplexed spirit, distracted amid the cares of life, to cast all its cares upon that God by whom even the very hairs of our head are numbered. And surely some wanderer was restored to the fold of mercy when he heard the parable of The Prodigal Son; the claims of charity and brotherhood were strengthened by the story of The Good Samaritan; the careless awakened by the parable of The Barren Fig-tree, and the sorrowing disciples comforted by the enduring and exhaustless consolations of the farewell address. Who can estimate the good which Jesus has done, is doing, and

will yet do, through the whole earth, by the words which He spake? Truly might He say, "The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life."

Take but one example of the Saviour's compassionate regard for the ignorance of the multitudes that flocked around Him. Let us dwell for a few moments on the scene. We are told that He was moved with compassion when He saw the multitudes, "because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd." This was a sight, of all others, the most likely to call forth His warmest sympathies. With what various feelings will different men gaze upon a large crowd of human beings, at all times a most interesting spectacle to any thoughtful mind, whatever may be the rank or condition of those who form such a gathering. The selfish employer will regard them as so many "hands," as so much flesh and bone and muscle, that may be profitably laid out on a certain piece of work; the warrior as so much brute force, that may be drilled to the bloody work of the battle field, or so much human flesh, through which he must cut his way to the object of his fondest wishes; the political economist or statesman, actuated by the principles of a merely secular philosophy, as so many mouths to feed and so many backs to clothe the poet, as a heaving, restless tide, ever agitated by the storms of human passions, or smoothed like the summer sea by the smile of hope and joy; whilst his ear catches the "still, sad music of humanity," and he sings of the ever-varying phases

which the ever-surging sea of life presents in a crowd. Alexander *wept* because he could not lead his victorious armies, upon which he gazed with pride, to the destruction of another world. Jesus *wept* when from the slopes of Olivet he gazed upon the crowded city, because it would not place itself beneath the broad shield of His protection and love. Xerxes, the king of Persia, was moved to tears when he beheld from an eminence the millions of armed men whom he had marshalled on the plains below; and he gave utterance to the memorable saying, that not one of all these millions would be living in a hundred years. But with what different feelings did Jesus look upon the perishing multitudes in the city of Jerusalem, and how much more deeply was He moved, not merely at the thought that in a hundred years not one of these would be seen; but at their present and future wretchedness, and, therefore, much higher interests and more awful destinies are involved in His still more memorable exclamation: "If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes."

He saw the crushing evils which the multitudes around Him bore—their wretched social and their still sadder spiritual condition. He beheld in them a crowd of immortal beings pressing on to the dread realities of eternity. The apostle Paul, or Howard the philanthropist, would have been moved by a similar scene, but the Saviour's heart went out to them with a melting tenderness which no human bosom ever felt. He alone could fully estimate the worth of

the soul; His eye alone could reach the height from which it had fallen, and follow it into the depths of the abyss of wretchedness into which it had sunk.

One of the reasons assigned for His compassion for the multitude is that they "fainted." This term is not to be understood as referring exclusively to their physical condition. Faint and weary and footsore they indeed might be, for another evangelist has told us that they "ran afoot thither out of all cities, and outwent the disciples," who had departed by ship previously into a desert place. That they were tired; and that many of them lay down upon the bare sward of the upland moor, overcome with fatigue, and in a place where little or no human sustenance could be found, was, doubtless, the case. It was this same fainting, footsore multitude that He commanded in considerate tenderness to sit down upon the grass, and He opened His hands, and liberally supplied all their wants.

All this is true; but the expression "fainted" does not, I apprehend, refer so much to the physical condition of the multitude, if, indeed, it refers to this at all, as to the grievous, harassing, wearing-out bondage of ritual ceremony, traditional observance, slavish fear, and pharasaical enactment under which they groaned. Speaking of this cumbrous load, and of the Pharisees who imposed it, the Saviour says, "They bind heavy burdens, and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders." And Paul himself characterised the ancient economy as a yoke of bondage; and Peter, when addressing his brethren at Jerusalem,

spoke of it as "a yoke of bondage which neither we nor our fathers were able to bear." Oppressed by a system of mere rite and ceremony, from which, at least to the great bulk of the people, the life-giving significance, the vital power, had long since fled, they fainted as they vainly struggled to throw off the weary load. They panted for the air of freedom, or hugged their chains still more closely, and clung yet more desperately to the forms, the traditions, and the rites of their fathers. How the Saviour's heart would yearn over such a multitude! How He would long to tell them of the genial, generous, expansive character of the Christian faith, of that freedom with which the Son would make them free, and how eager He was to introduce them into the glorious liberty of the children of God, as He breathed over them the life-giving words—"Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest!"

Another reason assigned for the Saviour's compassion for the multitude is that "they were scattered abroad as sheep having no shepherd." What a sad picture of utter abandonment, danger, uncertainty, fear, and helpless wretchedness do these words, descriptive of the spiritual condition of the people, present! A torn and scattered flock of sheep, deserted by their shepherds, left a prey to wild beasts, or to perish of hunger in the desert waste, is the appropriate emblem of the religious state of the multitudes that now drew forth the pity of the Saviour. Language very similar to that was employed by the prophet Micaiah to King Ahab before the fatal battle

of Ramoth-Gilead—"I saw all Israel scattered upon the hills, as sheep that have not a shepherd; and the Lord said, These have no master."

This was but too true a picture of the great bulk of the Jewish people when the Saviour appeared. The poorer classes, or as they are termed in Scripture, "the common people," were haughtily thrown aside, and left uncared and unprovided for by those who ought to have been their guides. The Pharisees were too proud and self-satisfied to interest themselves much, either in the temporal or spiritual condition of the common people. "Stand by thyself; come not near to me; for I am holier than thou." "This people who know not the law are cursed." But although the Pharisees admitted this, when did they ever take any pains to instruct the people? If they did so, it was only to add to the burdensome weight of rite and ceremony, and oppressive tradition; but never in any one instance to enlighten, alleviate, or heal; and hence the Saviour's condemnation of them, because they had shut up the kingdom of heaven against men; they had taken away the key of knowledge, devoured widows' houses, compassed sea and land to make one proselyte and made him worse than themselves, paid tithe of mint and anise and cummin, but omitted the weightier matters of the law—judgment, mercy, and faith. They should have been the teachers, the protectors of the common people; but so far from being so, they treated them with contempt. Their general bearing may be gathered from that well-known case in the

parable of The Pharisee and the Publican. When the former prays in the temple, he scarcely deigns to look upon his fellow-suppliant, but says in the pride of his heart—"God, I thank thee that I am not as other men are, . . . or even as this publican."

To the multitude it was a dark night of bondage, when the powers of the soul were crushed beneath the weight of a system of painful and rigid observance, of intricate and minute details, which the *Jewish Popery* of the time had greatly increased, but, as to spiritual guidance and warm-hearted enlightened instructors, they had none. In this respect they were abandoned, left to wander as sheep without a shepherd. The common people in Judea at this time, so far from being the objects of religious interest and sympathy, were in a position little better, if any, than the poorer classes in the chief cities throughout the heathen world. Ancient philosophy, like Jewish Pharisaism, treated the people with contempt, or ruled them by a system of traditional ceremony, superstition, and terror. Alike in Judea and in the Gentile world "they fainted; they were scattered abroad as sheep having no shepherd." "In all the governments and empires of the East, the people were held but of little account. In Rome they were fighting slaves; in Sparta, helots; in Athens, idle vagabonds; and throughout the whole ancient world, the masses of the people were degraded—brutalised by political despotism." No philosopher or philanthropist had ever interested himself in their behalf till the Saviour Himself appeared. Jesus alone stood pre-eminently

forth as the friend and the teacher of the poor; and when He beheld them left a prey to the delusions of every wild visionary, or the ruinous schemes of every designing demagogue, or to the pernicious dogmas of every false teacher, like a scattered helpless flock of sheep left to ravenous wolves, His pity knew no bounds.

This was not mere passive sentimentalism; it was not the sudden flash of the meteor that expires in darkness; it was not the rapid gush of aimless and indefinite feeling that soon spends itself, but it was compassion that gave rise to the noblest efforts for the good of the common people, who "heard him gladly," because they found in Him, the teacher, the friend, the healer, they had so long and so much required. Hence, we are informed by another evangelist, that as soon as He beheld the multitude as sheep without a shepherd, "He began to teach them many things." As the Shepherd of Israel, He began to lead them to the green pastures and still waters of divine truth—to explain to them the object of His mission—to instruct them in the great truths of His kingdom—to show them that He was the teacher sent from God, the Messiah promised to their fathers, and that He came to seek and to save that which was lost, and give His life a ransom for many. He sought to confirm their faith in the words of ancient prophecy, which were now fulfilled in Himself—"I will seek that which was lost, and bring again that which was driven away, and will bind up that which was broken, and will strengthen that which was sick."

As His eye rested upon this vast multitude, which in point of number and ripeness for immediate effort, resembled the yellow waving grain in the harvest-field, Jesus turned to His disciples, and said, "The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few; pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest."

And if there was such wondrous love manifested throughout all His brief ministry on earth, what shall we say of His death, when He offered Himself a sacrifice without spot unto God? It was in keeping with His life and with His love. How many were on His heart of hearts, when He hung dying on the accursed tree! "God so loved the world"—the whole world of mankind-sinners—that He gave His only begotten Son, "who tasted death for every man." "For we thus judge that, if one died for all, then were all dead."

"Jesus, my heart's dear Refuge,
Jesus hath died for me."

From the cross the words of mercy flowed from His lips, and now from the throne He entreats all to come unto Him and be saved. In His life upon earth, in His death upon the cross, He had blessings for all. He has blessings for all still, for "the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come: and whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." Why should any one stand without, when Jesus entreats him to come in? Oh, come! come to Christ! Come as you are, take Him as the free gift of God, and

receive the best of blessings from His generous hands! Come in, come in, eternal glory thou shalt win!

VI. *He went about doing good, as an example to His followers in all time coming.*

He has taught the afflicted in every age the patience with which they should bear trial, the meek resignation with which they should ever bow to the divine will, the spirit of prayer which all should ever cherish, and the energy and activity we should bring to bear upon the advancement of His kingdom, which is "righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost." How much may we learn from the open sincerity of His whole life; His patience, His magnanimity, under the most grievous sufferings; His complete mastery over all the passions of our nature; His entire devotedness to everything connected with the weal of our race; His dignified consistency and perfect command of Himself in the most trying situations; His all-pervading honesty of purpose; and, in short, His all-absorbing zeal for the good of mankind and the glory of His Father! In one word, GOOD DOING was the all-pervading work of the Saviour's life, varied as the ills which afflict humanity, and commensurate with the deep wants of our nature, and that GOOD DOING is seen in His every thought, word, and action, cherished, spoken, done for man. What a life! And what an example He has set His people, that they should follow in His steps.

They bear His name, and their lives should be

Christ-like. They should cherish His spirit, and walk as He walked. Let the great end for which we live be that for which the Master lived—the good of others; and let us pursue this with a constancy and devotion that will not shrink before any opposition, for why should we abandon a good work because men oppose it? This should bind us all the more closely to it, for the Master's sake. Animated by His example, let us do good to all as we have opportunity; and we can never be without this in a world of so many sins and sorrows, if we have but the seeing eye, the ready hand, and the feeling heart. We follow the Master, alas! at a great distance, but let us see that we do follow Him in His life of true goodness, and let us imbibe that spirit which bore such a pressure of evil, gave rise to so many works of healing, to such a holy example, to so many kindly and generous influences, which have kept the heart of the world warm ever since His blessed feet trod our earth! Who can know Him without loving Him, and without being influenced by the same spirit to do good? This would not be confined to any one class or condition in life, or to time or place, or to any species of labour, but every follower of Christ would exhibit its practical power. It would shine in the duties of the domestic servant, faithfully discharged for the sake of the Master in Heaven; in the honest work of the pious artisan; in a good example given in the workshop; in the holy influences by which a mother's warm love will surround her children, and in her efforts to store their

youthful minds with precious truth; in a father's prayers; in all the hallowed ministrations of the family altar, as well as in all the more public duties of our holy faith; in all the benevolent agencies of the pew, as well as in the services of the pulpit, or in arduous missionary enterprise in the high places of the field.

Let us seek more and more to pervade the duties and labours of every-day life with His spirit, and our Christianity will be no longer of a passive and inert, but of an eminently active and practical character. Surely He has a right to expect, in return for all that He has done, that you will labour for Him in some sphere of usefulness, constrained by high and holy motives, drawn from His life, His obedience, His sufferings, and, above all, from His cross. "Who is on the Lord's side, let him stand forth." To all such Christ is saying, "Occupy till I come." "Go work to-day in my vineyard;" and is there any doubt as to where the vineyard is? Go work in the vineyard of thine own heart; there are noxious weeds to be rooted out. Go work in the vineyard of thine own home. This is God's mission to every one who bears the name of Christ, and it is his bounden duty to do what in him lies to arrest the progress of evil and to promote the cause of righteousness and truth.

The willing mind will always find work, and the way to do it. Let no one excuse himself, even in the humblest walk of life, after such examples as John Pounds, the lame shoemaker, who founded

ragged schools, or Sarah Martin, who, amid all the demands of a toilsome occupation, was for many years a daily visitor at the prison of her native town. Let no one immersed in the cares of commercial life excuse himself, after such examples as William M'Gavin and David Naismith, both men of business —the one honoured to write "The Protestant," and to do much evangelistic work, and the other to found City Missions. Many are the fields of usefulness that are now before you. Enter—take possession—labour, until the Master shall come by and by, and take you home to your rest and your reward.

With the life of Jesus before us; with the holy faith which springs from it, and which was confirmed by His death; with all the motives for earnest action which that life and death present, and with all the holy activities around us which they have called forth, we do not despair of a better time to our distracted, sin-smitten earth. The dawn is already gilding the peaks of the distant hills—the morning breaks—the shadows begin to flee away.

Such, then, are a few, and but a very few features in the benevolent life-work of Jesus. As you contemplate His career in all its intense devotedness, untiring constancy, its multiform and various efforts, are you not constrained to admit, not only that He was a teacher sent from God, but that He was Himself the manifested Deity in our nature, to save and to glorify our fallen humanity. There is a moral beauty in such a life, which shows that He came to reveal the Father, and that He and the Father are one. And how

is it possible, think you, that the fishermen of Galilee, unlettered and obscure as they were, could have invented such a life, or portrayed with such simplicity and beauty the moral loveliness of such a being, when all the learning and skill of the wisest ancient philosophers would have failed in the attempt? The evangelists had no previously existing model to guide them, nor elements of character such as those which made the life of Christ stand out sublimely alone. The life which they describe in the gospel narrative, so simple, unadorned, divinely beautiful, is a proof that they must have been inspired to write as they did; for their thoughts that breathe, and their words that burn, were not of the earth, earthy, but came from above.

In conclusion, let the following considerations encourage us more and more to walk in the Saviour's steps:—

What life so happy as that which most closely resembles Christ's? It is the only living worthy the name of life, embracing the highest aims, the noblest companionships, the purest enjoyments, the brightest prospects, and the most glorious rewards. This is the life which makes the most of both worlds, having the promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come.

What life so useful as that which is quickened from on high? Such a life will, in some degree at least, resemble that of Christ, and cannot fail to leave its mark for good somewhere. Many illustrations of this will occur to your own minds. The Apostle Paul is

a bright example, and I might also suggest such names as Bunyan, Chalmers, Wilberforce, John Newton, and Hedley Vickars. Would to God that every one of us could take his own life as a case in point! What are we doing to help on the cause of Christ? which, after all, is the cause of the world's emancipation from the dominion of evil. How useful every one of us might be in the various spheres of life in which we have been placed!

> "And there be none of all the poorest poor
> That walk the world, worn heart-bare, none so poor
> But they may bring a little human love
> To mend the world. And God Himself is love."

Is there any one here still out of Christ? Still a stranger to Jesus as a personal Saviour? Then the first thing he has got to do is to accept of Him; not to regard Him as a mere name, or a dead letter in a printed book, but as a present, living, loving Saviour, who entreats us by everything that is sacred to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. This is the first and the greatest of all objects of search. Having found this, and entered into the kingdom of God by faith, let us go and work for Christ, constrained by His love and by His spirit. Saved ourselves, let us seek to save others. The time for working will soon be over. Meantime, by all that is worth preserving in our beloved country; by all that deserves to be handed down to latest posterity; by all that is lovely, consistent, and of good report in the Christian life; by all the great interests that are suspended on our activities, faith and prayer; by

all the antagonistic forces that are at work—the good and the evil, the light and the darkness—let us live and labour for the Master,—

> "For the cause that lacks assistance,
> For the wrongs that need resistance,
> For the future in the distance,
> And the good that we may do."

To follow the Master's example of doing good is the best attitude of preparation for another and a better world. Our loins will be girt about and our lamps burning, and we shall be like unto men that wait for the coming of their Lord. This is to be ready, this is to watch; and to watch and to be ready in the best way. What better attitude of expectancy can there be than this—"in the Lord;" waiting and working for the Lord? Such may say, "For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." "Prepare to meet thy God;" and what other preparation can there be for this meeting that is certain to come and may not be far off, than to live with and for that Saviour who went about doing good? All who thus live, are living in the Lord; and when they die, and depart to be with Him, they rest from their labours and their works do follow them. It was said of a noble worker of old, one of God's ancient worthies, who did good service for the Master in his day and generation, "Go thou thy way till the end be, for thou shalt rest, and stand in thy lot at the end of the days."

May it be so with us all! And when the labours and trials of life are over, may we all meet in our Father's house at last, in "the home over there," where

all work will be worship, and worship will be the highest offering of the redeemed soul.

> "O may we stand before the Lamb,
> When earth and seas are fled,
> And hear the Judge pronounce our name,
> With blessings on our head!"

Be it ours now to look around us, and see what distress we can relieve, what sorrow we can soothe, what bitterness in the lot of any of our fellow-men we can sweeten. God lays the opportunity to our hand. We may not see it, but it is there. The words were addressed to Moses when he was in doubt and fear, "What is that in thine hand;" and the same question is now put to every one of us by the Spirit of God. The present is ours, to-morrow the opportunity may be gone for ever: "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest."

CHRIST'S SELF-SURRENDER.

"Who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father."—Gal. i. 4.

CHRIST'S SELF-SURRENDER.

IT not seldom happens in the writings of the Apostle, that he cannot bring in even the very name of Jesus, without pausing for a little to descant on the glories of His person, and the wonders of His love. We have an instance of this, in the opening words of this chapter. As for example in the usual salutation with which he begins this letter: "Grace be to you, and peace, from God the Father, and from our Lord Jesus Christ." The closing name is that of Jesus, which was to the writer as a lingering note of sweetest music; a soul-melody that never died away; and as ointment poured forth. It awakened within him the most sacred memories, and it gave him ever and anon a fresh impulse to renewed activity in the Master's service. It quickened and brightened the current of his thoughts; it set his soul on fire, and the very mention of His name is like a sudden gleam of sunshine, which but serves to reveal with greater brightness than ever, and in a glow of holy emotion, that wondrous life of self-denial and love. Paul has just written down the name of Jesus; it shines before him, as it comes not only from his pen, but from his heart of hearts, and in the sudden rapture which the very name begets, he adds, "Who gave himself for our

sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father."

With feelings akin to those of the Apostle, let us consider the various points which those words present —the gift of Christ; "He gave Himself"—the gift of Christ in relation to our sins, or the urgent need for this gift: "He gave Himself for our sins"—the design of this gift: "to deliver us from this present evil world" —the source of this gift: "according to the will of God and our Father."

I. *The gift of Christ, "He gave Himself."*

Earth and all its fulness are His; the silver, and the gold, and the cattle upon a thousand hills are His;

> "Depths of the earth are in His hand,
> The strength of hills is His."

Countless worlds are His, and all their hidden treasures. He had these to give, but all these could never be compared for a moment, with the marvellous gift of love expressed in the words, "He gave Himself." All these could never have atoned for sin. Wondrous words! wondrous love! wondrous gift! the giver, God! for none but God could give Himself. These words, as applied to Christ, point to the laying down of His own life, and to all that He had to give for the salvation of man. All that the divine could give, all that the spotless human nature could do, and suffer, and give, in connection with the divine, was done, was given. "Himself!" What a gift, what a love, what a depth of meaning in this one word, as referring to the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ! His whole life was

an entire surrender of Himself—the consecration of His whole being to one grand object, the accomplishment of the will of God in the salvation of our guilty race. This purpose ran through the whole of His life, and consecration to it was life itself. There were supreme moments, however, in that wondrous life of love and moral beauty, when this complete surrender of Himself rose to the sublimest heights of spiritual grandeur. It was His whole life indeed, but it flashed out at times with such irresistible force and brightness that even the dullest heart must have been moved and quickened by it. For example, when but a child of tender years, that divine impulse came upon Him, revealing to Him the glory of the great mission of mercy for which He was to live, and for which He was to die; and He said to Mary His mother during His first visit to the Passover, when she had sought Him sorrowing, and found Him at last in the temple, filling with dumb amazement the most learned men of the time by His earnest inquiries: "Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" Here was the early flashing out of the spirit of self-devotion and of full surrender to His Father's will, and His Father's business, which was the redemption of our fallen world. And now when He has begun His great life-work, hear Him as He breathes out this spirit of entire self-consecration in such words as these: "I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work;" "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work;" "I have a baptism to be baptized

with, and how am I straitened till it be accomplished." Listen to that thrice-repeated cry of His soul-agony in Gethsemane, when His spirit of self-consecration was tested to the utmost, "Father, not my will, but thine be done!" During the long, dark, weary hours upon the cross, when the earth trembled, and the rocks rent, and the framework of Nature shook, and the sun withdrew his light, He endured till He could say, "It is finished." As the Lamb, slain before the foundation of the world, in the eternal purpose of the Father, He offered Himself without spot unto God. All was given that the divine and the human nature could give, in the person of Christ Jesus, to save fallen man.

When a man gives himself to any cause, object, or person—gives himself, for example, to his country, as the patriot does; or to his friend, as Jonathan did for David—when a man surrenders himself entirely, with an all-consuming devotion for any life or cause worthy of this sacrifice, we cannot but admire the burning zeal and love which lead to such a surrender. But in every such case amongst men we can measure the gift; we can grasp the word "himself" as applied to man, for he is, at the best, but a finite being. But "Himself," as applied to our Lord Jesus Christ, God manifest in the flesh, the brightness of glory, the express image of the Father's person—who can measure the gift expressed in the words, "He gave himself"? Who can estimate the self-denial, devotion, and love in such a surrender, such an entire consecration as this "Himself"?

This is Christ's free gift of everlasting love to all mankind-sinners. "He gave himself for," or on account of, our sins, and to every sinner He is the gift of God for eternal life. To be a gift at all, it must be free, and so it is. If we attempt to work for it, or pay for it, or do anything at all, it ceases to be a gift, because we are vainly trying to make God our debtor. "He gave himself" that we might simply receive Him. Trust Him, and what blessings will follow! To "as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name." In ordinary life, what is it that we do with a gift but take it gladly and gratefully? Why not the same with Christ? "He gave himself" that we might just take Him as we are; gave Himself, that we might give ourselves to Him in return; our sins, that He might take them all away, and that we might have Himself, in all His fulness, His righteousness, His light, His strength, the blessings of His salvation, pardon, purity, peace, eternal life—all that as sinners, we need, in return, and all free. Free! "By grace are ye saved, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God." You are commanded to work out your salvation, but this implies that you have already got it, as the free gift of God, through the blood of His Son. But you are not commanded to work *for* it. No; this is in vain. Christ hath finished the work for us all—"*It is finished!*" There is all the difference in the world between the two, and this has been strikingly brought out in the words of the Apostle, "Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned

of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness."

But mark me well here, and let there be no mistake as to the practical effect of this acceptance in Christ on the after-life of the believer in this world. Some object to this simple act of trust in Christ at the outset, as if it were the whole of the Christian life. This act of accepting Christ, as the gift of God, in the simple, loving trust of the soul, is certainly not the whole of the Christian life, but only the beginning of it—the first step of real advance. The race, the conflict, the struggle, the warfare of which the Scriptures speak, when describing this life, come all afterwards, to be of any avail in the final issue. There may have been all this before—ay, a struggle as if for death and life, as, alas! in the case of very many, before they really accept of Christ. But what are all these, without trust in Him? Any toil, any striving or conflict, apart from simple trust in Christ, is of no avail to the real life of the soul. All that striving *to do*, apart from Christ, cannot obtain salvation. Accept that gift in the simple act of trust, and then, in the whole of the after-life, there is ample room for all the arduous conflict, for all the constant endurance of hardness, as good soldiers of the Lord Jesus Christ; for all the work and self-denial of Christian heroism of which the Saviour and His apostles speak, when they urge us to "strive," to "fight," to "run" so that we may obtain, "to endure unto the end;" to abound in the work of the Lord; to be faithful unto the death,

that we may receive the crown; to fight the good fight of faith, that we may lay hold on eternal life. First trust: that trust which brings the soul into loving union with a personal Saviour; then *try* to do as much as in you lies in the service of the Master. Toil and triumph, and at last, through God's grace, victory will be reached; but all springing from trust. The spiritual process is this—trust, toil, triumph—rest for evermore! We have the Saviour's own words of promise for this—"To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne."

II. *The gift of Christ "and our sins."*

What is the relation which the one bears to the other? What has the gift of Christ to do with our sins? But for these there never would have been such a display of love as that recorded in the text. Certainly our sins did not beget the love of God for us, neither did the sacrifice of Christ on our behalf do this, but the very number and aggravated nature of our transgressions brought out with all the greater fulness and brightness that wondrous love of which we have the sublime record in these words: "He gave himself for our sins." They touched the loving heart of Christ with pity, and when nothing else but the giving of Himself was sufficient to meet the extremity of our case, He came to put away sin, by the sacrifice of Himself. "Behold what manner of love is this." For it was the urgent need on our part that led Him

to give Himself. "Our sins"—the sins of our race, there they are!—mountains of transgressions, how high, how black, how terrible, unsunned by a single ray of light, or of hope, till Christ in the greatness of His love gave Himself! And why? Because nothing that man could give, or do, or endure, could possibly put away sin.

> "All for sin could not atone,
> Thou must save, and Thou alone."

When the Apostles or the Prophets speak or write about the death of Christ, is it not invariably in connection with our sins? "He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities;" "For the transgressions of my people was he stricken;" "Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world;" "Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures." The love and justice of God in unison demanded this sacrifice, and it was given by Him, who alone had power to lay down His life, and to take it again in our behalf. Nothing short of this gift would have sufficed to meet all these demands, and let us ever bear in mind that justice as applied to God is but another phasis of His love, for He is the just God and the Saviour, and in proof of this He spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up to the death for us all. How great the love of God on the one hand, and how urgent the need of the sinner on the other! Man cannot redeem his brother, nor give his life a ransom for him. The redemption of the soul is precious, and but for this gift it would cease for ever. But the voice of mercy was heard—"Save from going

down to the pit, I have found a ransom," and here we have it, "Who gave himself for our sins." What a contrast is here! "*For our sins*," for us, when sunk in all the pollution of sin, in the depths of misery! The spotless, the righteous One, gave Himself for us; gave Himself to a life of ceaseless conflict with evil, and all its powers in their most revolting forms; gave Himself to a life of shame and suffering, to lonely sorrow and woe, and to the accursed death of the Cross. When men bestow gifts they do so upon a friend, or in return for some important service that has been rendered, and as the token of gratitude and esteem, or for some distinguishing qualities in the person, that have attracted their admiration, or won their love; but here is the wonder of wonders, Christ gave Himself for our sins. "God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." And yet all this is so like God, the Father, so like the Son of Man, the Saviour, and so like the Spirit of Love, who is now knocking at the door of every heart, in the name of the risen Christ, and offering Him, and all the blessings of His salvation, to every sinner; entreating them to accept of Him "who gave himself for our sins."

III. *The design of Christ in giving Himself for our sins—"to deliver us from this present evil world."*

This world is full of beauty, so full that there are scenes so bright and fair, days so lovely that you may call them "days of heaven upon earth." But the shadows of evil, alas! are never far off. You need not

be told that the world is full of evil; sorrow, and suffering, and all the fell and foul results of sin meet you everywhere. Each human heart is a world of evil in itself, what then must the vast outer world be! "This present evil world!" Did not God at first pronounce all things to be good? Yes, and they were so, but the dark shadows of evil had not then fallen upon the earth. Many have lost their way, and some of the highest intellects have been utterly bewildered in their vain attempts to account for the origin of evil, in a world under the government of a God of love. A child may put a question which no philosopher, no intellect however profound, may be able to answer: as, for instance, why did a God of love permit evil to enter this fair world at all, and work such havoc and woe? This will be made clear some day, in the light of God's heaven—so clear that even evil itself will be compelled to yield up a revenue of glory to a God of love. What we know not now we shall know hereafter, when that which is in part shall be done away, and that which is perfect shall be come. Meanwhile it is surely enough for me to know and believe that a way of escape has been provided from all the evils that are in the world. Evil is around me everywhere, but God in mercy has opened up a way through it all, and everyone is invited to enter, and pass upward to that bright home where evil shall be for ever unknown.

The Saviour saw and felt this as no one ever did or could do. What a burden must have been on His crushed spirit, when He uttered the prayer on behalf of His friends, "I pray not that thou shouldest take

them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil." The design of Christ, in giving Himself for our sins, was to deliver all who accept of Him as their Saviour, from the evil that is in their own hearts, by imparting to them that faith which worketh by love, which purifieth the heart, which overcometh the world. "This is the victory, that overcometh the world, even our faith." They are made clean by the blood of the Lamb, by the indwelling of the Spirit of God, who applies that blood which cleanseth from all sin, and are thus delivered from the evil that is in their own hearts, by the expulsive power of a new affection. The sinful nature is subdued within them, for the new, the divine life of purity is begun in the soul, the moment that Christ is accepted, and the will is surrendered to Him. Their life is hid with Christ in God, and they now advance in the Christian course, with the help of God, towards final victory over evil within and without. Far higher objects for which to live are now presented to the soul, than anything which the world can offer to immortal beings. The world has its place, but no longer the highest, as it had before. It is no longer their portion, no longer that for which they live, and toil, and die; but the redeemed look forward to a world, bright, and fair, and sinless, beyond this, for which to live with all their ransomed powers, a world on which the shadow of sin shall never rest, and for which their deliverance from the present evils, by which they are surrounded, is preparing them to enter. Now they are "in this present evil world," in it, but

not of it; in it to do battle with the sin that is everywhere around them; in it, to bear witness for God and His truth; in it to be delivered from its power, and to pass over as God's redeemed ones into the bright inheritance-home, where there shall be no more curse, for the former things have passed away.

Meantime we are in this world of many trials, and are not exempt from them. "In the world ye shall have tribulation." Shall we speak of afflictions to the people of God as evils? We are taught to believe that they are mercies in disguise. If there is anything in them to remind us that we we are still in an evil world, it is but the shadow of the curse on the dial-plate of time, until the morning of a better day shall break and the shadows flee away. For He gave Himself for our sins that He might deliver us from this present evil world. His people shall be delivered, not one shall be left in the grasp of evil; if so, Christ would be dishonoured, the purpose of God the Father would be broken. But this cannot be. No; Thy people, O Lord, shall pass over, they shall be made more than conquerors through Him that loved them. "Thou shalt bring them in and plant them in the mountain of thine inheritance, in the place, O Lord, which Thou hast made for thee to dwell in; in the Sanctuary, O Lord, which thy hands have established."

The grounds that we have for cherishing this assurance are the purpose of the Eternal Father, in the redemption of His people, the design which Christ had in view in giving Himself for them; the express promises of the Father and of the Son, and the present

witness of the Spirit in the hearts of His people. "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God." "In whom also, after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance, until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory."

IV.—*The source of this gift—"according to the will of God and our Father."*

Christ gave Himself for our sins, because God the Father, in the great love wherewith He loved us, willed that it should be so. Far away back in the depths of the past, long before the advent of Christ at Bethlehem, these words were heard from the excellent glory, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love, therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee." Here we reach the fountain of this mighty river of blessing. It is the will of God our Father, that men should be saved. "He will have all men to be saved, and come to a knowledge of the truth." Christ came to do the will of His Father; the will of one is that of both. Christ, therefore," gave himself for our sins, according to the will of God and our Father." God is love, and the will and the love here are the same. The gift of Christ, when "he gave himself for our sins," did not purchase the love of the Father, it was but the manifestation of that love, it was the river of blessing that flowed from this fountainhead of mercy. "God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son;" Christ so loved

the world that He gave Himself; and God the Spirit so loved the world that He bore witness to Christ as the Saviour of mankind-sinners; and He so loves the world still, that He opens the heart of the sinner, hardened and polluted though it be, to receive this gift. All is love; all is gift; all is of grace, free grace; all is giving on the part of God; all is receiving with us; and all this love, all this grace, all this giving and mercy, "is according to the will of God and our Father." This is the exhaustless fountainhead. We cannot get beyond this; we cannot rise above it. Here we rest on the will of God, which is love to our fallen race. "Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight." Here is the source of that wondrous gift; here is the inspired interpretation of the expression, "he gave himself," it was "according to the will of God and our Father." "God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus."

Let me impress upon you once more before we part, that the blessing of eternal life which Christ has secured for us, by all that He has done in our behalf, is a free gift, and should be received as such. This, however, is the stumbling-block in the way of many. They cannot bear the thought that it is all a gift; that it is all free, and that it must be all taking and all trusting first on their part, and that all true Christian work must come after this, not before. You remember on one occasion the Saviour said to the Jews, "Labour

not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you; for him hath God the Father sealed." They missed altogether, as many, alas! have done, this idea of the gift "which the Son of man shall give unto you;" and so, clinging to their own idea, that they must *do* something of their own to merit the favour of God, and to obtain the blessing which, if got at all, must be taken as a gift, they replied, and now mark the words, "What shall we do, that we might work the works of God?" The answer of the Saviour to this question settles for ever the terms on which the blessings of His grace are to be obtained. "Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent." And what is this but receiving the gift which God freely offers to us, in the person of His Son Jesus Christ? The moment you apprehend Christ by a faith that does not work, as the ground of salvation, you enter into the possession of a faith that *does* work, ay, and will continue to work on until the end. This is the faith that never can do enough for Christ —never. It is always seeking to do more; a faith that is only limited by the frailty of our frame, and the conditions of our earthly surroundings.

Here, then, is the wondrous gift of the Saviour's mighty love, which passeth knowledge; a gift the blessings connected with which cannot be expressed in words. *What return shall we make?* Take the gift, give Him the loving trust of your hearts, yea, your hearts themselves, in return. What must it be

for any one to refuse this gift, or to treat it with indifference or neglect? God's love to His own Son then becomes righteous indignation to the sinner. "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?" How? Can you tell me of any way of escape for the soul that refuses this gift? The Bible is silent, and what can I say, but urge everyone to accept of Christ? Lay your sins on Him, give Him your sins to take away, that you may be no longer under them, but under His precious blood, and He will give you His righteousness in return. This is the only way of escape; this is God's remedy for sin; this is the design of the free gift, "to deliver us from this present evil world."

What is the practical influence of this wondrous gift upon our hearts and lives? There is no return that we can make for His mighty love that will be more honouring to Christ and more blessed to ourselves, than by showing the purifying power which it has, in our deliverance from the evil maxims and practices of the world. This is the living proof, patent to all, that we have accepted this gift, and that in doing so we have been taught of Christ to cherish His spirit of self-denial; that we are constrained by His love not to live altogether to ourselves, but that we have felt the loving touch of a new power, leading us not merely to avoid the evils that are in the world, but to oppose them by speaking the truth in love, by living the truth in love, and by all those deeds of Christian kindness and charity which are the best

evidence of the soul's acceptance of Christ, and of the power of the Spirit over our hearts and lives. Let us seek more and more to honour Christ and His gift of love, by showing that we have imbibed His spirit, that we are doing His work, and that we are living as those who have been redeemed by His blood. It is in this way that we will show that we have been delivered from "this present evil world."

Once more, Christ gave "Himself." Let your lives be consecrated to His service in the spirit of the words—

"My body, soul, and spirit
Jesus, I give to Thee,
A consecrated offering,
Thine evermore to be."

On a painting of the Crucifixion these suggestive words appeared at the foot of the cross, and in the dark shadows which surround it, "I did this for thee! What hast thou done for me?" This is a thrilling appeal to every heart, in the presence of which we may all ask, Where is the cordial acceptance of Christ? where the spirit of our Master pervading our lives? where the sin that has been slain? where the evil subdued? where the work done for Him? where the advance in holiness of heart? where is the deliverance that you can show from "this present evil world"?

THE PATH OF THE JUST.

"But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day."—Prov. iv. 18.

THE PATH OF THE JUST.

THESE words were brought home to my heart, and invested with new interest and beauty, when I stood very early one morning on the summit of the Righi, to witness the rising of the sun. This is the shining light referred to in the text, to which the path or the life of the just man is compared. What a power and beauty were given to these words in the glorious sunrise of that morning, as I gazed on it from that lofty plateau in the centre of the Alps! It was still dark; the light of the stars (and how bright it is, in that cloudless sky, and in that clear atmosphere!) had not yet faded away, when I stood in the keen, frosty air on that mountain summit, waiting to catch the first rays of the sun, which would strike a distant peak in the east, and tinge its crown of snow with the crimson blush of coming day.

A vast range of mountains stretched far away from east to west, not in a long, unbroken chain, but peak rising above peak, and all beyond a certain height covered with the dazzling mantle of snow.

A sea of rolling mist lay in the valley. As the faint light of approaching day became stronger, the snow-crowned peaks in the distance seemed to rise out of this ocean of mist like the white sails of so many great ships on a frozen sea.

Long before the dawn many visitors had found their way to the summit, and stood in eager expectancy of a wondrous sight. They were not doomed, as is often the case, to disappointment, for the glorious sunrise of that morning was a memory for life. They were from many lands, they spoke in various languages, they held very different creeds, but the striking grandeur of the scene bound them all together in the thrilling emotions of wonder, admiration, and awe. They had never met before, and they would never all meet again; but in the glory of that morning which transfigured everything around them, which would follow them into the future, and abide with them as a bright spot, a precious experience and memory, they were made one, however far apart their lives might be spent in this world.

I can vividly recall the scene, but no words of mine can describe it. All eyes were turned towards the orange and crimson tints in the east that spread upwards, and, as the first quivering rays tipped with gold the highest mountain peak, and quick as thought flashed upon others, and from these again in rapid succession to the more distant summits—till from side to side, in front and rear and all around, the brightness and beauty of the new-born day stood disclosed, amid the overwhelming grandeur of the Alps, the scene of surpassing magnificence was burnt into the memory as one that never can fade away. The burnished gold passed from the mountains, but the burning thoughts and feelings awakened by the scene must ever remain part of our very being.

The ocean of mist gradually crept down into the valleys, and as it sank lower and lower, the mountains stood out all the higher, till the flashing light of morn fell on the retreating clouds, and mountain and valley, grim pass and rapid river, glassy lake and smiling hamlet, shepherd's hut and shieling, bosky dell and dingle, grey rock and flowering boulder, shaggy cliffs and giant-pines, were all revealed with wondrous beauty in the morning smile.

Higher, higher the sun rose through the cloudless sky of deep blue, crowning the perfect day of noontide splendour among the glorious Alps with the perfection of beauty. And when towards evening, his bright ball of fire in the west flashed crimson, purple, and gold over sea and sky, lake and river, and tinged the eternal mountain snows with colours that seemed like the rainbow round about the throne, and when the edge of his crimson rim had disappeared behind the great mountains, the snowy summits of which were on fire with the brilliant afterglow, we were reminded, as we had never been before, of the words of our text, "The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day."

Such is the memorable scene with which the text must be ever associated in our mind—and now for the points of resemblance between the path of the just and the shining light, as to origin, progress and perfection.

I. *As to origin.*

The shining light emerges from the darkness at the dawn of the day, and so does the path of the just,

or the believer on the morning of conversion. The path of the just is the life which he leads after he has received the converting grace of God, and has become a justified person by the righteousness of Christ.

The light of the morning is cradled amid the darkness of departing night. The light breaks in the east, and the rosy morn comes from the shadows of night, that now flee away. So is it with the beginning of spiritual light and life in the soul. In some cases the dawn may be hardly perceptible, the change is so gentle, so gradual, so full of stillness, that nothing seems to have taken place to indicate the turning point in life; but doubtless it has been made. The night was there before the morning light, the darkness before the dawn. In other cases the sudden in-breaking of the light is such, that it is by no means difficult to point to the supreme moment when the soul was brought out of darkness into God's marvellous light. There is a great spiritual crisis, call it by whatever name you will. Our Lord speaks of it as a new birth; and in harmony with the comparison in the text the apostle says, "Ye who sometimes were darkness are now light in the Lord." An unconverted state is in Scripture compared to darkness—"having the understanding darkened," they walked in the darkness of nature, "being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart." The morning of conversion is always preceded by a dark night of distance and alienation from God, in some cases deeper than in others, and longer continued, but still it is the night, the winter of

the soul. There is not only spiritual darkness, but there is death; so that the path of the just towards God and heaven, towards purity and peace, begins where the darkness of an unregenerate state is brought to a close. The dayspring from on high visits the soul, Christ rises upon it as the bright and the morning star. The night of darkness passes away, for the true light now shineth. This is the dawn of the morning to the soul. New light, life, peace, hope and joy enter in and dwell there. These are not the fruits of darkness, but of the light. He who has been the subject of this change may be able to say very little about the evidences upon which the Christian faith as a system of truth rests, but he can say this at least, and after all it is the best evidence, "One thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see." "God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

Is this your experience; do you know this blessed change, not from hearsay, but as one through which you have actually passed? If you cannot tell the time when the spiritual dawning took place, make sure that you are now walking in the light, and that you are the children of the day and not of the night!

II. *Another point of resemblance is Progress*, and this seems to be the main idea of the text.

The shining light advances in its path through the heavens, it does not linger in its course. There is first the faint streak of light in the east—the dawn—the

clear, fresh, opening morn—the gradually expanding light and heat—the bright effulgence and full-spread glory of noon—the soft repose into which nature sinks with the setting sun. "Which is as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, and rejoiceth as a strong man to run a race. His going forth is from the end of the heaven, and his circuit unto the ends of it; and there is nothing hid from the heat thereof."

So should it be with all who have begun the Christian life. It is a race, and they should so run that they may obtain. We see the same law operating everywhere, "first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear."

The path of the Christian through life should be one of progress in knowledge of divine things; in holiness of heart and life; in usefulness and activity; in meetness for the inheritance of the saints in light.

1st. *Progress in knowledge of divine things.* "Here we see through a glass darkly." This must always be true of our state here, as compared with heaven, but we are commanded to grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. Surely we cannot be for years in His school and remain just as we entered it, at the beginning of the Christian life. What would be thought of us were this the case in regard to other departments of education. "Always learning and never coming to the knowledge of the truth." Here surely, if anywhere, are the words appropriate,

"Higher, higher let us climb up the Mount of Glory."

The higher we go the wider will be our range of

vision, till the last peak scaled—if indeed that can ever be reached—the vast ocean of truth shall lie spread at our feet. And even after all, we shall feel as the great philosopher did, that we have only gathered a few pebbles on its shores. It is surcly to be expected of the believer, that as he advances in the divine life, he will become better acquainted with the evil nature of sin; with the purity, extent, and spirituality of God's law; with the deceitfulness of his own heart; the defects and imperfections of his own life; with the claims which God has upon his gratitude, love, and obedience; the scheme of human redemption, and with the blessings which it has procured for our fallen race. His experience will advance from the grey dawn of the morning, when he beheld men as trees walking, till in the light of God he sees light clearly, and "counts all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Jesus Christ our Lord." Alas, that we should be such apt scholars in the ways of the world, and yet be so dull and lifeless, and such mere babes in the school of Christ!

2nd. *Progress in holiness of heart and life*; and consequently in moral power. As the sun advances in his course through the heavens, the raw and chilling mists are scattered from the mountain's brow; the threatening clouds are parted; and the lowering day bursts forth in the beauty, splendour, and warmth of summer sunshine. So will it be with the soul, when the power of divine truth, the bright beams of the Sun of Righteousness, the light of the Divine Spirit, gain the ascendancy, and evil passions and habits are

broken up, and dispelled. This reminds us of Milton's beautiful invocation to the Holy Spirit :—

> "So much the rather thou celestial Light!
> Shine inward, and the mind through all her powers
> Irradiate; there plant eyes; all mist from thence
> Purge and disperse; that I may see and tell
> Of things invisible to mortal sight."

The sun is often obscured by clouds, aud the light of the believer is often darkened by sin. The clouds that hang about the sun shut out his light; and the corrupt nature, and the sins that cling to the believer, greatly mar his purity, and impede his progress. But even here the bow of promise is in the cloud, "A new heart will I give you, and a right spirit will I put within you." "Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you, will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ."

The design of God, in implanting the divine life in the soul, is our growth in purity; and for this end we are presented with the most powerful motives. As for example, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God;" "Every man that hath this hope in him, purifieth himself, even as he is pure;" "This is the will of God, even your sanctification." And as the light of the sun will pierce through the darkest clouds, and scatter them by its bright beams, so the light of purity in the soul, by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, will break through the darkest shadows of sin, and whilst revealing the baseness of a corrupt nature, will, at the same time, assert the power of a new, a divine life. "Beholding as in a glass the glory of the

Lord, we are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord." "Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart." "Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy: when I fall I shall arise; when I sit in darkness, the Lord shall be a light unto me."

3rd. *Progress in Christian usefulness and activity.* What a blessing the sun is to all lands and climes, and throughout all the months, from dewy morn till dusky eve. "All his paths drop fatness." The flowers are his, and he calls them forth, that he may fill the eye with beauty, and the sense of smell with fragrance. The song of birds is all the sweeter when he shines. His are the luscious fruits that ripen under his smile. The tall trees of the forest spread their great arms with joy to meet him. His are the rich harvest fields of golden grain, and the reapers' song of gladness. Ceaseless and beneficent progress is the law by which he shines; and, in all this, is there no resemblance between the path of the sun, and that of the Christian through life? Progress, beneficent action, is the law of existence in both cases. And if the natural sun sheds down unnumbered blessings on our path, still more precious surely are those blessings that the Sun of Righteousness sheds upon our world, by means of lives quickened by His mighty power!

What a blessing the life of Jesus has been to the world! And every soul brought into His kingdom should be a centre of light and love in the midst of darkness. We read on one occasion that the Saviour had a special interest and regard for a young man

who came to Him with a most important enquiry, but who went away when he heard the reply. Did he ever return? It is not said that he did, and we are left to conclude that he missed his one grand opportunity in life—the tide which he did not take at the flood, but allowed to ebb away. Did not the current of his life run through sands and shallows ever after?

What a blessing it is when the morning march of life is all towards the Sun of Righteousness—when the dew of youth, so fresh and bright, and sparkling in His beams, is consecrated to His holy cause of true goodness, and when the energies of early manhood are laid out in His service. But more lovely is the sight, when, after the lapse of many years spent in the Master's work, hoary hairs are found in the paths of righteousness. "They shall still bring forth fruit in old age," and that, in more attractive loveliness, drawing all eyes to it, like the glories of the setting sun.

Christ is the light of the world, and every soul that has received of His light will shine, no matter where his lot may be cast, or what his rank may be; he will shine in the humblest or in the highest walk of life. One day, when passing by the side of a newly-ploughed field, I was attracted, and my curiosity excited, by something that I saw shining with unusual brilliancy in one of the furrows. I entered at an opening, walked up to it, and found it to be a bit of broken china! There it was, reflecting brightly, in the furrow of the field, the beams of an April sun. And in like manner, if we have the light, let us shine; shine, if our lot should be cast in the lowliest furrow, or on the high

places of the field. Let us shine in the beauties of holiness, in works of faith, and in labours of love.

4th. *Growing meetness for heaven.*

Progress in knowledge of divine things, in holiness of heart and life, in Christian activity, cannot be dispensed with; it is absolutely needed by every soul that would enter the bright mansions above. Heaven, with all its light, and life, and beauty; with all its spiritual enjoyments, privileges, and honours, and, above all, with its unsullied purity, would be no heaven to a carnal, unchanged nature; it could be little short of the misery of hell. Lift a man all at once from among his rude companions; take him out of his rough life, his low, debasing enjoyments, and without any previous preparation for the sudden transition, place him in an entirely new atmosphere of purity, and in the most elegant and refined society; surround him with all its gentleness, sweetness, and purifying influences, and with comrades of the highest culture; could he possibly enjoy the change? Could he feel at ease? Would he be quite at home? Would the new scene and the new pleasures increase his happiness? So far from this, everything about him so foreign to his tastes, former habits, and companionships, would be as a terrible night-mare to his weary and oppressed spirit. And how could the unchanged soul that has made no progress towards heaven, has taken advantage of no training for that high destiny, do in that pure and happy home? Where could be its enjoyments, its pleasures with "the saints in light," when it was itself in darkness? Hence it is of the

utmost importance for us ever to bear in mind that heaven consists more in our growing likeness to Christ, more in our preparedness of soul, in the beauty of holiness, more in ourselves and in our moral oneness with Christ, than in mere outward locality or physical surroundings, however fair or lovely the scenes may be that they present to the eye. And so the path of the believer should be one of growing meetness for heaven,

> "Yet nightly pitch our moving tent
> A day's march nearer home."

A dark and stormy day in our northern clime is often closed by a calm and lovely sunset, leaving behind it an afterglow of radiance over the sky, that seems to partake more of heaven than of earth. Thank God, so is it often with the sunset of life to the believer! His sun goes not down "obscured amid the tempests of the sky," not lost amid the driving clouds; but "melts away into the light of heaven." That is the abundant entrance for which all the previous training and discipline of his Father was preparing him. It is not so with all. The sunset of life to many a child of God may seem to be a very dark setting. The mellow radiance of hope, peace, and joy does not gild his closing hours. Stormy, troubled, and dark the parting may be; full of pain, sorrow, and doubt. He may even die and make no sign. What shall we say of this? Has not the sun often gone down in dark clouds and tempest? But think of the morning and its bright sunrising and its clear shining after rain. Sunset to the believer may be dark, as if there had been no progress made at all towards

heaven. Divine Pity knows best what that progress has been under His discipline: and sunrise to that soul in eternity will be far brighter than the fairest morning without clouds that ever rose upon this sinful world. Whatever be the sunset of a believer's life, this holds true of all who are in Christ: "I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand."

III. *Perfection.*

Progress ending in perfection, but not here; no! but in "the perfect day" of heaven's brightness and glory. "The perfect day" is not for earth but for heaven. "When that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away." The shining light reaches a point of perfect splendour, and the path of the just leads to the perfect day, the glorious consummation in heaven. As to knowledge of divine things, here we know in part, there we shall know even as we are known. In our limited vision here we gather but, as it were, sand from the shores of Time; there we shall find gems of purest ray serene. Here the feeble intellect was soon exhausted in its search after knowledge; there it shall soar with untiring wing, amid the glories of a light that never shone on earth or sea. Heaven will be the perfect day of intellectual vision. They shall see the "King in his beauty," and be in darkness no more.

Then as to purity, what a change! There are spots on the disc of the brightest sun that ever shone, but there are none on the spotless robes that have been

washed and made white in the blood of the Lamb. There will be no sin, to cast its dark shadows there; no temptation, to seduce and draw away the soul from its loving allegiance to God, and no impure thought, to degrade. Heaven will be "the perfect day" of unsullied purity, for nothing shall enter there that defileth. This is a state of sinless bliss, compared with which all the progress made towards holiness upon earth was but the grey dawn.

As to useful activity, it will assume a more exalted character, it will embrace a wider range. "They shall serve him day and night in his temple." That venerable philosopher, Sir David Brewster, who made such important discoveries in relation to light, was accustomed to say that one of the great joys and glories of heaven would consist in the revelation of all the marvels and mysteries of creation and science by Him by whom all things were made, and who is not only the Head of the Church, but the Head and Origin and Source of all science. "I have been infinitely happy here," he said on his death-bed; "but I soon shall be infinitely happier with my Saviour and Creator."

"As a physician," Sir James Simpson wrote, "I have often watched by the dying, but I have never seen a death-bed scene more full of pure love and faith than our late President's.* His death-bed was indeed a sermon of unapproachable eloquence and pathos, for there lay this grand, this gifted old philosopher, this hoary loving votary and arch-priest of

* He was President of the Royal Society.

science, passing fearlessly through the valley of death, sustained and gladdened with the all-simple and all-sufficient faith of a very child, and looking with unclouded intellect and bright and happy prospects to the mighty change that was to carry him from time into eternity. That faith made to him the dreaded darkness of the valley of death a serene scene of beauty and brightness." What a sphere of endless enjoyment and ceaseless activity must be at once revealed to such a soul on its entrance into heaven!

It will be "the perfect day" of peace and joy. "The ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs, and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away." This is the happy home-coming of the redeemed. No distraction there, no strife of tongues, no weary burden to oppress the soul with unrest and vexation. "There remaineth a rest for the people of God." "They do rest from their labours, and their works do follow them." It will be rest in the most blessed activity. "They shall summer high in bliss, upon the hills of God," and yet at the same time, their service shall be unceasing, untiring, and most delightful. Here they had the darkness of sin, sorrow, and trial; but they have passed for ever beyond the confines of all these. "They are saints in light," for they are now in the presence of that God who dwelleth in the light; "who covereth himself with light as with a garment." In His light they see light clearly, in the home of undimmed brightness, where sin and all its shadows have for ever passed away.

There is another path very different from that of the just. It is this, and it stands out in striking contrast: "The way of the wicked is as darkness; they know not at what they stumble." There is progress also in this way, but it is all downward; all towards destruction, and it is certain to end in the "blackness of darkness for ever." It is a rapid descent into the depths of woe. Can you hesitate for a moment which to choose—the path of the just, or that of the wicked? Life or death, cursing or blessing?

The sun of your mortal life must set, and that soon. Shall it be in light or in darkness? Shall it be to usher in the morning of a bright and happy eternity, or that terrible gloom on which light never fell, and which has never been cheered or brightened by one solitary ray of hope? "How long halt ye between two opinions?" "Choose ye this day whom ye will serve." Make up your minds; the time is short. Open your hearts to receive Christ. If you once really see what He is to you as a precious Saviour, you will not be able to keep your heart closed against Him. What is your choice? Is it more light, more light, the light of God; or deeper darkness; the darkness of eternal woe? I cannot close with this awful word sounding in your ears, and therefore by the mercies of God, by the love of Christ, by the gracious strivings of the Holy Spirit, by the solemn realities of eternity, by all that is dear and sacred in connection with your never-dying souls, I beseech you to come in from the darkness, and sun yourselves in God's marvellous light!

A DAY OF POWER.

"Who then is willing to consecrate his service this day unto the Lord?"—1 Chron. xxix. 5.

A DAY OF POWER.

TAKE it all in all, this was perhaps the most remarkable day in the life of David the King, and in the history of the Jewish nation. There may have been more splendid gatherings during his reign, but none for a nobler purpose; none in which there was a greater display of loyalty to the king, or of true patriotism and of lofty devotion to the cause of God. Many circumstances combined to give peculiar interest to this occasion—the prosperous condition of the country; the peace which it now enjoyed from all its enemies round about; the assembling of the tribes under their respective heads, to render thanks to the Giver of all; the remarkable free-will offerings of the people in token of this; the fervour of spirit that characterised the solemn religious service which was held; the unity and enthusiasm that prevailed in connection with the grand national undertaking of building a magnificent temple for the service of God. The secret of all this patriotic devotion to the noblest cause that had yet called forth the sympathies of the entire nation is to be sought for in the words of the king himself: "Because I have set my affection to the house of my God." It may be emphatically called a day of power in the life of the king and in that of the

nation, and a very vivid account of its proceedings has, therefore, been placed on record, for the encouragement and the imitation of the people of God in all ages.

It was a day of power, because distinguished for great liberality, for united effort, for hearty rejoicing, for earnest prayer, and for unreserved consecration to the service of the Lord.

I. *A day of power because a day of liberal giving.*

The king, the chief of the fathers, the nobles, the princes, the people, gave; the whole nation, without exception, came forward to give. They were all of one heart and of one hand as to this. They provoked one another in a spirit of noble emulation to offer willingly. It was never known till now how much every one had to spare, and how ready each one was to give. The king himself was greatly surprised, and exclaimed with adoring gratitude and wonder: "But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort?" The abundance quite astonished him; the readiness with which it was given was more gratifying still. "They offered willingly, because with perfect heart they offered willingly to the Lord." Bearing testimony for himself and for his people, the king said, as he appealed to the omniscience of God: "As for me, in the uprightness of mine heart I have willingly offered all these things: and now have I seen with joy thy people which are present here, to offer willingly unto thee."

That is a day of power to any man, to any family,

community, assembly, or nation, when self is slain, and the heart gives all it can, yea, gives itself, to a good cause. That is a day of victory which no armed force can gain, for self is subdued. This is not to be done by carnal weapons, but by a power far beyond all these. And yet this is a triumph in which all can share; rest not until you obtain it. The widow with her two mites, which she cast into the treasury, stood forth to the eye of the Saviour invested with greater moral heroism and self-denial than did those who had cast in of their abundance. She cast in all she had, all her living, for every selfish consideration had utterly vanished from her mind. In her extreme poverty it was a day of power and blessing to her soul. The loving eye of the Saviour took note of it, and He has given her a place in the records of eternal fame. This is a victory to be won in every rank of life; amongst the poor as well as the rich; all may taste its sweets, and hold the reins of this power over self. We have examples of this in the churches of Macedonia, whose "deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality," and those early Christians who "sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need."

What but the might of God's Spirit can subdue self, and open the heart and the hand that were formerly closed against all generous deeds? "A people shall be willing in the day of thy power," to give first of all their hearts unto the Lord. If these are withheld, it matters little what else is given. First the heart unto the Lord, then the hand to His work, and the day

that sees this with any man, with any family or community, is a day of power. The Apostle speaks in glowing terms of commendation of the liberal spirit displayed by one of the churches he had planted, "For to their power, I bear record, yea, and beyond their power they were willing of themselves; praying us with much entreaty that we would receive the gift, and take upon us the fellowship of the ministering to the saints. And this they did, not as we hoped, but first gave their own selves unto the Lord, and unto us by the will of God."

The greatest day of power in the annals of the universe was that on which the Saviour "gave himself" to put away sin, and the Apostle felt that he could present no stronger appeal, no higher motive for generous giving, than that which is to be found in his own words, "Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich."

"I gave my life for thee;
My precious blood I shed,
That thou might'st ransomed be,
And quickened from the dead.
I gave my life for thee;
What hast thou given for me?"

II. *It was a day of united effort in the great common cause.*

The united hearts and hands of the people made that a day of special power. There were no rival interests, no factious opposition; jealousy and suspi-

cion were hushed, and the whole nation was welded together by a spirit of generous emulation and brotherly love. Union is strength, and the people now rose, perhaps for the first time in their history, in a combined might, which they had never put forth before. What mighty power, what hallowed impulse is given to the Churches of Christ, when the scattered sections which have stood aloof from each other, are brought together, under the constraining influence of love. In the presence of this, divisions are forgotten, and the partition walls that kept them asunder are broken down. They melt away and disappear in the warm sunshine of Christian brotherhood, as the snow-drifts of winter vanish before the balmy breath of spring. It is matter of profound sorrow surely, that such blessed seasons should be like angel's visits, so few and so far between.

Meanwhile the Church of the living God is shorn of her strength; she lies wounded and bleeding in the presence of gigantic evils with which she seems almost powerless to cope. And why? because her ranks are disunited and broken, and her right arm struck down in weakness, humiliation, and defeat, to the joy of her foes. The world is steeped in sin and sorrow, because the sacramental hosts of the Lord are divided amongst themselves. The following question is understood to refer to the Church of Christ, and describes it as it ought to be in unity and power. The glorious reality as yet seems to be in the distance—"Who is she that looketh forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners?"

There is a prayer, the full answer to which has been long delayed, but still it rises before the throne, and it will be answered yet, in the future glory of the Church, in its unity, purity, and spiritual power, and in the peace and happiness of the world. "That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me." The union of all His followers on earth lay near the heart of Christ, as the true secret of their strength, in their conflict with the evils that are in the world. Surely it is their duty to draw towards one another, in the spirit that prompted the intercession of their Great High Priest. The strongholds of sin still frown aloft in proud defiance, and cast their dark shadows around the feet of a weary, weak, divided Church. Oh, for the power of faith and union and love among all the followers of the Lamb! "Awake, awake; put on thy strength, O Zion; put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, shake thyself from the dust; loose thyself from the bands of thy neck, O captive daughter of Zion."

III. *It was a day of great joy.*

The people rejoiced, and it is stated as a reason for this, that they offered willingly. "The king also rejoiced with great joy." It was a red-letter day in the history of the kingdom. There is power in joy; "The joy of the Lord is your strength." How much more any of us can accomplish, when we are anointed with the "oil of gladness," compared with those times of heaviness and depression, when there was no more

spirit left within us, and all our strength had gone. The purest joy which an unselfish heart can possibly experience in this world is that of giving for the relief of the distressed; for in this something has been done to soothe and to sweeten the bitterness of life—what a pure joy that is!

In nature there is joy and power in giving. How merrily the murmuring rill, glinting here and there amongst the ferns, patters on to the river, to lose itself there, as if rejoicing in the possession of power to give; and with what a mighty rush of strength and gladness the majestic river sweeps onwards to the sea. The brightest time in the life of the flower is when it gives all its hues to the sun, and all its fragrance to the breeze. The clouds rejoice, when they empty their treasures on the land, made blithe with plough and harrow. The stars rejoice when they are seen on the dark forehead of the night, forever singing as they shine.

> "There's not the smallest orb, which thou behold'st
> But in his motion like an angel sings,
> Still quiring to the young ey'd cherubims."

When the lark sings at heaven's gate, and the thrush on the topmost bough, and when all the birds pour out their little full hearts in song, there is no moment in bird-life so joyous as that.

God has so ordained that no one who is willing to give shall be without the luxury of giving something by which he may be made glad himself, and by which others may be made to rejoice.

What joy must be that of the Eternal Father, who

is always giving, who opens His hand and supplies the wants of every living thing, who spreads a table for all that live. He gave His only begotten son, His unspeakable gift. Yes, what a joy must be in the heart of God, the giver of every good and perfect gift! "He shall joy over thee with joy, he shall rest in his love, he shall joy over thee with singing." Let us not rest till we know something, at least, of the joy of the divine nature, in seeking to impart to others what we have ourselves received of the grace of God. What a depth of joy must have been in the Saviour's loving heart when He was giving it all out, in kind words, in wondrous acts of healing, bearing all our infirmities, and at last upon the cross pouring out His soul unto death. With joy He gave Himself, for no selfishness was there, "who for the joy that was set before him, endured the Cross, despising the shame."

IV. *A day of earnest prayer.*

One of the most remarkable prayers in the Bible is that contained in this chapter, which was uttered by the king in connection with the proceedings of this memorable occasion. For grandeur of conception, strong faith in God, sublime adoration, fervent gratitude and praise, this prayer stands alone in the life of the king.

Prayer is but another word for power, "For as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed." There is no power like it, because it lays hold of the strength of the Almighty, and that is the power that subdues self, opens the heart to give,

and nerves the arm to work. "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength." This is the telegraph between earth and heaven—between the heart of God and the heart of man. Would God! that we knew in our personal experience more and more of the power that lies in prayer, and the new supplies of grace it brings for the wants, the duties, the trials of every day. Prayer is the great need of the Church and of the world. The praying few in the upper room on the day of Pentecost kept together till the Spirit of God was given. His advent that day moved the world, and will yet bring it to the feet of Jesus. The men that have had power over themselves, or who have been able to give anything permanently good or great to the world, have been men of prayer. That was a day of power when Asa, the king, had to face with his small army an overwhelming force, but there was strength in his cry of conscious weakness, "Lord, it is nothing with thee to help, whether with many, or with them that have no power: help us, O Lord our God; for we rest on thee, and in thy name we go against this multitude. O Lord, thou art our God; let not man prevail against thee." And man did not prevail, for the hand of the Lord was present to work mightily in behalf of the weak, in answer to prayer. For what purpose has the Hearer of prayer so often set His seal to its efficacy, and given us so many precious promises in connection with this duty, but to bring us nearer to His throne as suppliants, "That we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need."

Look at that blind, helpless man in the house of Judas at Damascus. He left the city of Jerusalem full of pride, bigotry, hatred, and persecuting fury, so that the early converts to the Christian faith trembled at his very name. Now he is humbled and brought very low. See him on his knees. "Behold he prayeth." This was the beginning of new life to his soul, the moment when he opened his eyes upon a glorious destiny, and saw the Crucified One, to love Him and to work for Him so long as life remained. Why? Because he was brought in prayer to cast himself at the feet of Jesus, and in his utter prostration to lay hold of the Nazarene, whom he had so lately despised, and whose followers he had persecuted to the death. That was a supreme moment, not only to that struggling soul itself, but to the world; and the might that lay in that prayer still vibrates in his immortal words on the printed page, and thrills in every heart, to whom "though dead he yet speaketh."

When Hezekiah spread the threatening letter, which filled him with so much alarm, before the Lord, on his knees, he rose calm, strong, assured. And why not? Why not every child of God, in similar circumstances of perplexity, in the face of such a promise as this, from the Hearer of prayer—"Call unto me and I will answer thee, and shew thee great and mighty things which thou knowest not?"

It is a common saying that knowledge is power, and so it is; but prayer is more, it is the strength of God in our weakness, our light in darkness, our peace in trouble. The testimony of the Psalmist, which has

come down to us through so many ages, is this, "Blessed be the Lord, because he hath heard the voice of my supplications." What then? These brought him more strength than all his armies could give, more peace and comfort of soul than he could find in an earthly crown. "The Lord is my strength and my shield: my heart trusted in him, and I am helped; therefore my heart greatly rejoiceth, and with my song will I praise him."

V. "*It was a day of solemn consecration to the service of the Lord.*"

"Who, then, is willing to consecrate his service this day unto the Lord?" was the stirring appeal of the king to his people. The practical reply to this is given in the following words: "Then the chief of the fathers, and princes of the tribes of Israel, and the captains of thousands and of hundreds, with the rulers of the king's work, offered willingly." They consecrated themselves, their substance, and their service to the Lord. The magnificent result of this was seen in the beautiful temple which, in the succeeding reign of Solomon, crowned the height of Moriah, and was the joy of the whole land.

When a man is brought up to this point of self-consecration, there is a new power for good in his life, by which it becomes more real, earnest, and devoted. He is impelled by other motives; he lives for a higher aim; he can now do for God what he never dreamt he could do before. He is now possessed by a power stronger even than selfishness, and by which it will

be finally subdued. It was thus with the Apostle Paul, when his nature was set on fire for the spread of the Redeemer's kingdom, for the glory of God, who had called him out of darkness into light. Every energy of his redeemed nature was consecrated to Christ. "This one thing I do;" and with what burning zeal he sped on from land to land, from nation to nation, on his mission of mercy, to make known the unsearchable riches of Christ! All the schools of philosophy had utterly failed to inspire any of their youthful or most ardent disciples with such enthusiasm, such undaunted courage, such marvellous devotion to one grand aim, which made him more than a hero in the ordinary sense of the term, raised him above all difficulties and trials, and which, to his fervid spirit, annihilated even space and time, that he "might by all means save some." How is it with ourselves to-day? Let this question come home to every heart, How is it with my life? What am I living for? What is it that possesses and rules me, and presses every energy of my being into its service? The world or eternity, light or darkness, good or evil—which is it? The heart must be set on something, the life devoted to some object or another. Ah me! what if God, and Christ, and the blessed Spirit, and the great realities of eternity have no place there? One thing certain is, that this consecration is at once true nobility and strength. It was this that made that particular day in the life of David the king stand out with a lustre all its own, from all the other days in his reign, and in the history of his people. A day of power, because

one of liberal giving, when self was subdued; of united effort; of great joy; of earnest prayer; of unreserved consecration to the service of the Lord. What is the day that is now passing over us in relation to all these? Let us seek the power that lies in giving for the cause of Christ. Let every one endeavour, in his own sphere of life, to promote that union which is so desirable amongst all who profess to love the Lord Jesus Christ, that their united might may be brought to bear upon the evils that are in the world. Let us seek the secret strength that lies in the joy of the Lord, in prayer, in a consecrated life; and all this for Christ, who loved us, and gave Himself for us; Who died for us that we might live, and that, whether living or dying, we might be His. Who will consecrate his life this day unto the Lord? Who will live and work for the Master? Who is ready to deny himself for the sake of Christ and His cause? Who will not shrink when the Master calls him to service? Who will not be frightened and start back, because of lions that are supposed to be in the way? Who will say, in reply to the Saviour's call, "Here am I, send me"? Shall the loving Saviour still have to stand at the closed door of any heart? Let Him in, for the day is far spent, the night is at hand. To-day the Master hath come, and He calleth for thee. Bid Him welcome to come in, to take possession of thy heart, to rule thy life, to crown thee at last with the unfading wreath of immortal bliss.

"Bring thou thy worthless all,
Follow the Saviour's call!"

THE

SECRET OF HOME HAPPINESS.

"And all the people departed every man to his house: and David returned to bless his house."—1 Chron. xvi. 43.

THE SECRET OF HOME HAPPINESS.*

THESE words may seem at first to suggest very little that can be turned to profitable account, but it cannot be so with anything that affects the home circle in its highest interests. The fact so briefly stated in the text does so. To bless home is to make it a blessing, and this cannot be done in any one instance without making it the centre of much good to others. It is in the home circle that everything that is good and gracious for a community, or for an entire nation, must ever have its source. It is, therefore, clear at the very outset that the few words in the text are full of most important practical lessons, that press most closely upon our homes, and through them upon the whole nation. Let us see what we can gather from these few words touching the highest concerns of our every-day life.

I. *Common mercies.*

"His house," the home of a king indeed; but the word home is common to the race:—"And all the people departed, *every man to his house.*" All went *home.* How suggestive this one word is of every-

* Preached on returning home after a holiday season.

thing that sweetens the earthly lot of man; ay, even although a man's house may be very far from being up to the full measure of his wishes. It is his home, and that is the centre of his heart's best affections. It must be very poor indeed if it has nothing of hallowed memories, nothing of stirring and sacred associations, nothing of heart-music in it to awaken the tenderest emotions of our nature, and warm and quicken and brighten our lives. David himself had to say in his last words—and what dark shadows gathered over his spirit as he uttered them on his deathbed!—"Although my house be not so with God." No! it was not as he could have desired, and his own sins had much to do with it, but it was still his home, and his heart went out to it as to no other place on earth. God pity the heart that can no longer be touched by the word home, whether it be a palace or a hut, a stately mansion in a crowded city or a tent in the desert!

I was much struck in the desert of Sinai, when a member of our party proposed to one of a tribe of wandering Arabs to quit his hard life of extreme privation, as it appeared to us, and come with us to this country. The proposal, with all its advantages, was plainly laid before him again and again, and for a few moments he seemed to be in suspense, but after affectionately patting his camel on the neck he pointed over the wide waste in the direction of his tent, and exclaimed in his own expressive tongue, that his heart was in his home, and his home in his heart, and they could not be parted. The same feeling has been beautifully expressed in "The Deserted Village":—

"In all my wanderings round this world of care,
In all my griefs—and God has giv'n my share—
I still had hopes my latest hours to crown
Amidst these humble bowers to lay me down.
. . . . . .
And, as a hare, whom hounds and horns pursue,
Pants to the place from whence at first she flew,
I still had hopes, my long vexations past,
Here to return—and die at home at last."

It was so with the aged patriarch Jacob when, in Egypt, he made his dying request to his sons. "And he charged them, and said unto them, I am to be gathered unto my people: bury me with my fathers in the cave that is in the field of Ephron the Hittite." So was it with Joseph when he came to die, his heart went out to his old home in Canaan. "And Joseph took an oath of the children of Israel, saying, God will surely visit you, and ye shall carry up my bones from hence."

Thank God for home with all its drawing power on the human heart! Look at that hurrying crowd in the city, when the hour of release from toil has come; listen to the rapid footfalls on the busy streets, the hurrying onwards to the common centre of attraction —they are all going home. "All the people departed every man to his house." The words that end one chapter and begin another in the Gospel of John are very touching. At the close of a day during which the Saviour had met with much opposition, and had been assailed with threatenings and abuse, we read, "And every man went unto his own house.—Jesus went unto the Mount of Olives." Every man had his own house, and at the close of the day he returned to

it. Jesus had no house He could call His home, sc He went to spend the night on the mountain, beneath the open canopy of heaven. "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay his head." Home! what mercy so common! and yet it was denied our Lord! What mercy so brightens our earthly lot! and yet it is one we are ever apt, like the air we breathe, to overlook!

Observe, again, the king "*returned*" to his house. This is another very common mercy that we are ever ready to undervalue, just because it is so very common. How often we leave home, and return in safety, without a moment's thought about it, or without a single feeling of gratitude for the protecting care of God, who has watched over us! Some of us have gone out and come in for many long years, and after many wanderings far and near. It has not been so with others; and, doubtless, not a few instances of this are now before your minds. How many, alas! have gone out from their homes of late, on pleasure bent, and when everything seemed to go merry as a marriage bell;—but, ah me, they went out never to return! What heartrending illustrations we read of this from time to time in the columns of our newspapers! Sometimes the sad interest of the sudden event is centred on a single individual, who leaves his home, never to come back to it again, and whose death sends a thrill to the heart of the nation; or the calamity is such as to involve hundreds of families in the overwhelming grief of sudden bereavement, for

dear ones that went out, but never returned, for they perished in the depths of the earth, or were swept away in a moment by the devouring flood! Oh, to be ready—aye ready! "Boast not thyself of to-morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth."

I cannot close this part of my subject without reminding you of thousands amongst us who are away from home, without any parental oversight, exposed to all the sins and temptations of city life. Many of these are young persons of both sexes, who return at the end of the day's labour to their cold lodgings, and who, having nothing of the attractions of home, are all the more easily exposed to danger. It is a great blessing for such when they are brought under the influences of church life, and when these are made to supply, in some degree at least, the place of home. There are very few of us who could not turn the social side of our Christianity to good account in this direction, by taking special interest in those young persons who may come amongst us, from time to time, as strangers from the country. A kindly word, a friendly recognition, an invitation to attend that meeting or the other, or to take part in some appropriate work of the Church, would do much to remove the feeling of strangeness and isolation, and might form the turning-point in the city life of many young men and women. "A word spoken in due season, how good is it!" for it may be the saving of many a youth.

Not a few amongst us are fatherless and motherless, to whom the word "home" brings nothing but sadness, as memory goes back upon the past. Can we not lend

a helping hand to brighten their lot in life? Thank God for the Orphan Homes that have of late been erected, and which have called forth such an amount of Christian sympathy! Let all those who are blessed with the comforts of home do what in them lies to shed light on the dreary path of the orphan, who has often to fight the battle of life at fearful odds. Surely this is the best way in which we can show our gratitude to God for the blessings we enjoy in our own homes.

A word to orphans themselves. Think of the home above. You may all reach it. The Saviour has said, "I will not leave you orphans," and His desire is that you should be with Him at last; and oh, what a joy it will be when the fatherless here, return to their parents in glory, and are orphans no more!

II. *True godliness a great blessing to the home circle.*

"And David returned to *bless* his house." There was nothing in the external circumstances of the king, nothing in his victories, in the splendour of his reign, or in the pomp of royalty, that could bring such a blessing to his house as the fear of the Lord, and the godly life to which it must ever lead. It is true piety that confers the greatest blessing on a household. There is much, doubtless, in outward circumstances as to surroundings, income, mutual love, cheerful and happy dispositions, to make home bright, blithe, and cosy. Every one of us may contribute something to its blessedness, in this respect. But the crowning blessing of any family, whatever may be its rank and social

position, or other elements of well-being, is the spirit of true piety, which unites at once the heart and the home in faith and love to that gracious Saviour who, by the felt tokens of His presence, which must ever accompany a godly life, can make the earthly dwelling of His people a foretaste of that bright and happy home above, into which, as their forerunner, He has for ever entered. It was the spirit of true godliness which the king brought into his house, that made his return a blessing to it, and not the mere fact that his home was a palace, and possessed of the external advantages of a royal residence. It was by his spirit of true piety that he blessed his house on his return, more than he could do with all the wealth and pomp and honours of royalty which he could bring into it. What has that father to give his house that can confer a greater blessing on it than his life of true godliness, with all the kindly deeds and blessed influences that must ever be its outcome, inwrought, it may be, for many years with the whole framework and texture of the home circle? A dwelling may have everything to make it bright and happy, so far as this world is concerned; but if it be without the fear of God, and swayed entirely by a worldly spirit; if there be no family altar, not even the semblance of devout acknowledgment of God, who is the Giver of all the comforts under that roof-tree; if there be an utter absence of all those Christian influences that bring home nearer heaven; does not that house lack the main thing to its real happiness, viewed in its relation to time and to eternity? Is not that a poor and a

defenceless home after all? When the storm of trial shall come, God in the dwelling is the best safeguard. On the other hand, a home may be very poor as to the mere elements of worldly well-being; but at the same time, if true piety reign under that humble roof-tree, it is in possession of a blessing which the world cannot give, and which, when enjoyed, it cannot take away. The beautiful picture presented to us of family worship, in the dwelling of the Cottar, not a romance, not a dream of the poet's fancy, but a blessed reality, is a striking proof that true godliness is the greatest boon that a father can confer on his home circle, in whatever sphere of life he may be placed.

III. *Religion should not be confined to special public occasions, but should pervade the whole of our life.*

It should not be a thing of fits and starts, local and temporary, but inwrought with the whole of our daily lives. You will see at once how the text suggests this remark, when you take into account the time when the king returned to bless his house. I ask you specially to notice that he returned home after a great religious solemnity, perhaps the greatest that took place in the annals of the nation, with the exception of the opening and dedication of the magnificent temple in the days of King Solomon. In this, and in the previous chapter, a minute account is given of the removal of the Ark of the Lord from the house of Obed-edom to the city of Jerusalem. This was done in circumstances of such impressive grandeur and solemnity that the heart of the nation was stirred

to its depths. Music of the highest order, hymns breathing the noblest sentiments, were poured forth from the hearts of a glad and grateful people. The sweet singer of Israel, the minstrel king, signalised the happy event of this memorable day by delivering into the hands of the singers one of his sublimest Psalms of thanksgiving and praise, in which he calls upon the material creation to share in the general joy. It is the mission of the true poet to give a voice to inanimate nature. "Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice: and let men say among the nations, The Lord reigneth. Let the sea roar, and the fulness thereof: let the fields rejoice, and all that is therein. Then shall the trees of the wood sing out at the presence of the Lord, because he cometh to judge the earth. O give thanks unto the Lord; for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever."

It was immediately after the close of this grand and solemn occasion that we read that David the king "returned to bless his house." Some leave their religion behind them in the pew, or confine it entirely to certain times and places, such as the Sabbath-day and the church. They can part with it when it suits them, as they can lay aside their Sabbath clothes. These are to be worn on special occasions, so is their religion. The king of Israel brought his home with him, as a blessing to all beneath his roof. He returned from the sanctuary, carrying with him the spirit of the service in which he had been engaged, the faith which he had so publicly and so solemnly professed in the covenant-keeping God of Israel. He felt that,

as a father at the head of a house, as well as a king at the head of a great nation, it was his duty to carry his faith to his hearth, and show its power in the privacy of the home circle as well as in the glare of public life: so he returned from the solemn sanctuary service to bless his house. And how? Not by words only, but by all those gracious deeds and holy influences which he now brought to his fireside. He was thus a blessing to his house, just as you and I, and every follower of Christ, ought to be, by carrying into it the spirit and the practice of the faith which we profess to believe. How could he bless his house without prayer and family devotion, without a reverent acknowledgment of God and a pious example? These will be maintained in every walk of life by the true child of God. Is our religion to be like a mere Sabbath dress? Are we to leave the faith which we profess to hold, behind us in the pew, or at the prayer meeting, and not carry it with us to our own dwelling? Is it not to be feared that many do this? Those rash, unkind and hasty words, those uncharitable judgments harshly pronounced, that unchristian temper, that selfish, grasping disposition, not to speak of the entire absence of the family altar, or of any visible acknowledgment of God whatever, show but too plainly that the religion of many is not carried with them into the family circle, or into the business of every-day life. How many homes are thus cursed when they might be blessed! Shall it continue to be so? In what spirit shall we leave the sanctuary to-day and return home. Every one of us can bless his house. Let us see that we

carry from this service all those purifying influences that spring from our holy faith. Place your own names in the text where that of David the king occurs—and God grant that it may be true of every one of us as we leave this house to-day:—"And ——— returned to bless his house." It is not in church, it is not in public life, that you get to know a man best. No! but it is in the sacred precincts of his own home; it is there, in familiar intercourse, that you really learn what spirit he is of; and if his religion is worth anything at all it will show itself there, above all places, in its most winning and lovely forms.

IV. *A striking contrast.*

The contrast suggested is that which, alas! is so often witnessed between that house where the father returns to bless it by his affection, by all the graces and virtues of the Christian life, and that other home where the return is not a blessing, but a curse. Are there not some whose return to the home circle cannot be a matter of welcome and joy, because they bring no blessing, but the reverse? Their very presence throws a dark, cold shadow over the dwelling, like some dreary day that seems to have strayed from winter into the middle of summer. This may arise from many causes, not merely to be traced to the father or to one head of the household only; but these are to be sought for in the younger members of the family themselves. Do not let us limit the text to the head of a household, but let us look at it in the con-

trast which it suggests as applying to every member of a family. It depends entirely upon the spirit which each one manifests, on the temper that is cherished, whether the daily presence in the dwelling, or the return after a longer or a shorter absence, is to be sunshine or shadow, light or darkness, heat or cold, a blessing or a curse. Everyone may do much, either to sweeten or to embitter family life. It will be a sad, crushing thought, sooner or later, to any one, if his presence at home was such as to bring with it more of sorrow than of joy; more of the cold and bitter east wind of a perverse temper than of the warmth and gladness of a genial disposition; more of repelling than of attractive influence.

What shall I say of those homes where the approach of the father, when he returns possessed by the demon drink, makes every inmate tremble at the very sound of his foot, as he staggers up the stair? Home in such a case has long ceased to be fitly named by that sweet word, for its tales of sorrow are like the prophet's roll, written inside and out with lamentation, mourning, and woe. How different is that other home, where, on the father's return after a long absence, the children run to meet him, and the delighted wife exclaims, in the bursting joy of her heart—

> "There's music in his very foot,
> As he comes up the stair!"

Such a father returns to bless his house. What a contrast between the two homes! and it is all the greater, a still lower depth has been reached, and a still darker shadow rests on that wretched dwelling, when the

mother—ay, the mother!—returns not to bless, but to curse. It has ceased to be a home, for it presents scenes of misery and woe over which angels might weep. There are homes at this moment so blighted by this terrible curse, that, as I think of them, I am constrained in deepest sorrow to utter the words of the prophet: "O that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!" We have had many sad disclosures of wretched home-life in this city, made at the Justiciary Court at its late sitting, showing that no blessing can possibly rest on the home which that curse enters. Balaam came to curse the tents of Israel, but when he beheld them from the height he was constrained to bless. The demon drink can never change his curse into a blessing; a curse it must ever remain. Let no one for a moment imagine that he can return from any place, whether at hand or afar off, to bless his house, if he is holding fellowship with that which is robbing him of his manhood and stripping his dwelling of all that makes it worthy of the name of home. Surely it is time for every one of us, in the various spheres of life in which we have been placed, in defence of our home-circles, and for the sake of the young there, to fight against this curse with all our might. From one end of the country to the other, from all quarters of our city, there comes up a cry against it. Shall we not hear it, and be roused to action to protect our homes, defend the young, rescue the perishing, and bless our native land?

V. *Parental responsibility.*

David returned to bless *his house.* These two words imply individual responsibility. As far as the head of the house is concerned, it is *his house,* and it is his duty, his privilege, and his highest honour to prove himself a blessing there. Every parent is assuredly responsible to God for the use he makes of the high position of trust and privilege in which he is placed. Is he to be a curse or a blessing to his house? Surely it is the design of God in putting him there that he should be a blessing to his home, and so husband and wife are enjoined to live "as being heirs together of the grace of life, that their prayers be not hindered." The patriarch Abraham felt his responsibility in this matter, and never did the head of any house in the records of the Bible receive such a noble testimony from God. Here it is: "For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him."

I have on purpose placed this point last in this discourse, that if possible I might make my plea all the stronger, when I urge every one of you, especially the heads of families, to do what in you lies to bless your dwellings as the patriarch blessed his. This you can only do in the highest sense by having first of all the blessing in your own hearts, in the acceptance of Jesus Christ as your personal Saviour. The greatest good was brought to the house of Zaccheus when the Saviour entered it, and said, "This day is

salvation come to this house;" but mark you, ere He uttered these words the head of that dwelling had accepted Christ, and had begun a new life. He went out that morning a Christless soul; he had never truly blessed his house; he returned before the gloaming with Christ in his heart, with Christ ruling his life, and the change was so great that the Saviour came Himself to give the visible token by His own gracious presence, and by the assurance that henceforth that house was to be blessed as it had never been before. Receive Christ in your hearts and you get a blessing which cannot be confined to yourselves, but which you will also confer upon your homes, and no matter where you come from you will always return with a blessing. Before God and man it is your duty, your privilege, and your highest honour to do this. Where is the Christian spirit we are carrying into our homes? Life is very uncertain; we know not how soon we may be snatched from them, and from all that we hold dear in this world. We shall go out some day for the last time, and shall never return. Ah! how soon that may be! What blessing shall we leave behind? Meantime what blessing are we bringing to our homes every time we come back to them? Where is the family altar? Where the kindly feelings that should pervade home with something brighter than even summer sunshine, and with an atmosphere more genial than the breath of returning spring, when the face of the earth is renewed? Be it ours to bless our homes! We have all the opportunity, if we would only make use of it in the right direction. When the

evening comes that brings us all home, let us return to bless it; to make it blithe, bright, cheerful, and happy in the light of Christian love. Fathers and mothers strive after this, for the time is short, and our homes must soon be broken up.

It may seem to some as if this were only a subject for parents. No! it is for all; for brothers and sisters; for children as well as parents. It is the duty of everyone to strive to be an element of blessing in the home circle, and where the grace of God has laid hold of the heart, it will be so. Let us all seek more and more in the spirit of our holy faith, and following the example of Him who made the home at Bethany so bright and cheerful, to bless our homes and to make them so many centres of light and love.

As for myself, coming once more amongst you after a short absence, never have I felt a more intense desire, with God's help, to be a blessing to you than now. I do feel more than ever, from the many solemn admonitions which we have been receiving lately, the shortness and uncertainty of time; but whether my term of service will be longer or shorter amongst you, God grant that in the ministry of the gospel of Christ I may be more and more a blessing to you all! Will you kindly aid me in carrying out the desire of my heart? You can all help towards this, by your regular attendance on the services of the sanctuary, by your earnest prayers, by your kind co-operation in connection with all the Christian agencies that are at work in the congregation. Let everyone lend a helping hand. Your presence at the weekly meeting for prayer will

greatly cheer me; and I believe it will be a source of blessing to every one who will take advantage of this precious hour in the middle of the week. Every time you return to this house, let it be that you may not only get a blessing to your own souls, but that you may carry a blessing to the souls of others. Sanctuary service and home happiness should ever go together. The one should promote the other, and if not, there must be something wrong, which it is our duty to correct. Come here in the spirit of prayer, and with an earnest desire to profit, and you cannot fail to return with a blessing to your own homes. "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: they shall prosper that love thee."

CHRIST ALL IN ALL.

"Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all."—Col. iii. 11.

CHRIST ALL IN ALL.

THESE words plainly affirm that all national and class distinction, all merely outward circumstances, are of no avail in the admission of any one into the privileges of the Christian faith. It is not on these grounds that saving union with Christ is to be obtained, however much many would desire it to be so. A statesman, who was famous in his time, used to say that it would always be a serious objection to Christianity that it did not provide a royal road to heaven; that is, one way for the rich, the learned, and the fashionable, and another for the poor, the ignorant, and the rude. The pride and the exclusiveness of many cannot bear the thought that there should be but one way for all. Christ is the way, the truth, and the life, not for one class or nation, but for all. He is free to all, offered to all; His is the common salvation. He is the Saviour of all men, without reference to rank or station, or outward circumstances of any kind. These are not passports that can be presented at the door of mercy. It matters not to what nation a man may belong, or what may be his social advantages or disabilities, his peculiarities as to colour, language, or clime, Christ is free to him, independent of all these; and the only grounds for admission into

His kingdom are "repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ"—"a new creature;" for this radical change is needed by all, whatever be their condition in life, and to everyone who is the subject of this change, "Christ is all, and in all."

But this is only a one-sided application of this remarkable expression, the wondrous depths of which, human thought can never fathom, and whose fulness it can never exhaust. The words have a reach as wide as the universe itself, in which Christ is the great central figure. This is clearly taught us in the words which occur in the first chapter of this epistle: "For by him were all things created that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him. And he is before all things, and by him all things consist." There is, therefore, no limit to the statement contained in the text; and even when you have done your best to grasp it, and to unfold its meaning in some measure, you have, after all, caught only the merest glimpse of the wide sweep which it embraces; you have only touched, as it were, the hem of His garment.

I. *Christ all, and in all, in the revealed will of God.*

Take Him away from the Bible, in His saving relation to our race, and what have you left? From the first promise in paradise to the last prediction in Patmos, the revelation of God is full of Him. It is inlaid with Christ and His glory, as the firmament above is thickly studded with glittering stars. Its

pages are bright with His love, and fragrant with the odour of His name. Christ was the great Revealer of the divine will, and all revelation must, therefore, find in Him its source and its centre. From Him it must come, and to Him it must all, more or less, directly point. If we may truly say that the sun in the heavens is all in all in the material system of which he is the centre, in a far higher degree is this true of Christ in regard to Holy Scripture. All its rays of light converge towards Him; and, but for Him, these would be quenched in utter darkness. Strike the sun out of our system of worlds, were this possible, and you can form some dim idea of the terrible disaster! And what would the revelation of God be without Christ, the Sun of Righteousness, the bright and the morning star? and in what appalling gloom, without one ray of hope, would our world be wrapped, if His name and His glory were eclipsed in the firmament of divine truth?

II. *Christ all, and in all, as the manifested love of God the Father.*

He is so, because we can conceive of no higher display of divine love than this. Our knowledge is indeed very limited as to what the infinite God is, or as to what He can give or do; but we are surely not guilty of presumption, when we affirm that there cannot be a greater manifestation of love to fallen man than in the unspeakable gift of His Son. The Saviour has set a limit to human love in the following words:— "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay

down his life for his friends;" and may we not in all reverence affirm even of the love of God the Father, that it had no higher offering to make in behalf of our fallen race, nothing greater that it could bestow?

> "Behold the best, the greatest gift
> Of everlasting love."

Could it sound a lower depth, could it reach a loftier summit, or achieve anything nobler than it has done in the life, self-sacrifice, and death of our blessed Lord? In the annals of love there is nothing to be compared to this. Let Him reign supreme in our hearts.

> "Love so amazing, so divine,
> Demands my soul, my life, my all!"

III. *Christ all, and in all, as the Saviour of the lost.*

He occupies the most prominent place in history, as the Saviour of mankind. In this respect He stands above all others sublimely alone. All who have figured largely on the stage of time, and all those periods of change and upheaving that may be set down as marking important eras in the progress of the race, stand related to Him and to His Advent, as so many links in the chain of preparatory events that were leading on to the fulness of the times, when the Desire of all nations should come to give a new current to the life of man and to history itself, in the new reign of love, by seeking the lost, and giving His life a ransom for many.

If there is any one personal application of the text

that should come home to our hearts with greater force than another, it is this: Christ in His work of redeeming mercy, the only name, given under heaven amongst men, whereby we can be saved. In ordinary language we say that such a person or such a thing are "all in all," in a certain sense at least, because of the important relation in which they stand to other persons or to other things. As for example, the parent to the home-circle; the man who may be regarded as the main-spring in that establishment, keeping all things in motion and in order; the sound condition of the heart, the proper circulation of the blood, to a healthy frame; the germ in the seed, to the life and the growth of the future plant; the law of gravitation for regulating the motions of the heavenly bodies; a conscience "purged from dead works, void of offence toward God and man," to peace of mind. In these and in other cases, the "all in all" is that which can be least wanted, and we have only to apply this language of ordinary experience to Christ, and it will be truer of Him than of any other, that as the Saviour of the lost, He is our all, and in all. His own words are, "No man cometh unto the Father but by me." "I am the door; by me, if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture." There is no other door of mercy revealed to us; and, thank God! it stands open to all who will enter. He who entreats us "is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them." "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire

beside thee." My Lord and my God, my "all, and in all."

IV. *Christ all, and in all, as a loving personal Friend and Saviour to the believer.*

I say *personal Friend*, for we must stop at nothing short of this. Unseen, as to the bodily eye, He is present to the eye, the ear, the heart of faith and love! "This is my beloved and this is my Friend." The highest platform of Christian experience that we can reach on earth is to feel that we have a personal Friend who has a deeper interest in us than any other can possibly have; a Friend to whom we can go in all times of difficulty, disappointment, danger, sorrow, and trial, and tell Him all our heart, unbosom ourselves to Him, and receive His timely counsel and help. There can be no friend like Him; none who is so mighty to help you, so wise to guide, so constant, so tender and true, so gentle and kind. Earthly friends change; if they do not, they die, or are removed to a distance, and you cannot get their counsel, their sympathy, their aid, at a time when you may need these most; but the testimony borne to Christ is this: "Having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end." He rests in His love: He changeth not. With such a friend you really cannot be lonely, though the whole world should betray and desert you. "There is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother;" and who is He but Christ Himself? Can there be any one like Him? If you have once really enjoyed the blessing of fellowship with Him, He will be to you as

a friend—your all and in all. In this world of constant change, He will stand by you, "the same yesterday, to-day, and forever," and on His abiding strength you may at all times lean.

V. *Christ all, and in all, as a bond of union to His people.*

They may have creeds that differ on a variety of minor points, and in the manner of expressing divine truth, but in spirit they may be one, and may hold by all the doctrines which are essential to faith and godliness. The brief statement which contains the three R.'s of theology, will surely find a ready response in the hearts of all who profess to abide by the teaching of Christ:—Ruin by the Fall; Redemption by Christ; Regeneration by the Holy Spirit. The world alas! sees them broken up into rival sects and parties, but it utterly fails to see in these the same thread of gold —Unity in variety—which runs through the material creation, and binds all its different parts into one, as to origin and design. Underlying these divisions, there is a bond of union between the followers of Christ, and His very name rallies them round the same banner of loyal devotion to their Master, whom they all regard as the "Lamb of God" to take away the sin of the world. Take a map of any country, and you can easily tell where the capital is, for the roads and railways converge towards the heart of the country, which gathers all into itself, and at the same time sends out fresh streams of life-blood to the remotest parts of the earth. So is it with the Saviour

and all His people, whatever be the various lines on which they are moving, and by which they may unhappily for a time be kept apart. They are all going on towards the one great centre, for they are all one in Jesus, their common Head. Let there be more of Christ, and less of mere creed, more of individual union to Him, and less of party names and distinctions! Meanwhile it is most gratifying to know, and we speak, because we know and believe, that Christ in the sinless nature of man, in the perfections of God in the highest, in His work of mercy, in His death for the guilty, is all and in all as a bond of union to those who have the witness of the Spirit within them.

> "Bless'd be the dear uniting love
> That will not let us part;
> Though from each other we remove,
> We still are one in heart."

VI. *Christ all, and in all, as a test of character and life.*

It is not the Christian sect to which you belong, not your printed Confession of Faith, not the ministry on which you wait, that are to form the elements for judging either as to the one or the other, but it is "What think ye of Christ?" and how your thoughts about Him are translated into your daily lives? What conclusion have you reached as to His person, His life, and His death? The question was proposed by Himself as a testing one to His disciples. The answer which we give to it, if expressing our sincere convictions, settles all other enquiries as to character and

life. You remember the words of the aged Simeon to Mary, as he held the long-looked-for Messiah in his arms: "This child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; . . . that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed." This is the touchstone by which we are to be tried, for according to the views which we cherish about Him will be the daily tenor of our lives. What will the purest creed and the best section of the Church avail us if our life is not framed according to that of Christ? If our thoughts on this all-important matter fall below the level of Scripture, the current of character and life must do the same. Our convictions here, either on the one side or the other, must tell for good or for evil, and prove what manner of spirit we are of.

VII. *Christ all, and in all, as a motive to Christian work.*

There is so much to discourage, so many things to make us faint and grow weary, that the motive to continued effort and perseverance must be such as to bear the pressure of all these, and the strain of every trial, so that we may be faithful even unto death. Where is the constraining force sufficient for this to be found? Nothing in history or philosophy, or in the widest experience of human nature in its varied aspects, can furnish an incentive strong enough for continuance in the work of the Lord in spite of all obstacles. This alone is to be found in the life and death of the Lord Jesus. And so, you must have observed that the Apostles always present these when

pleading on behalf of any work of faith or labour of love. When Paul seeks to stir the hearts of men to practical sympathy and benevolence, he points to the cross; and when he urges the duty of mutual forbearance and forgiveness, he cannot rise beyond this. "And be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." If this fail to touch the heart to the highest issues of life, what will succeed? If this do not melt the selfishness of our nature, what will? In all the range of motives for action that can be brought to bear upon the human heart, either in the direction of personal holiness or effort for the promotion of the Saviour's cause, His quenchless love to the believer is all and in all. This will bear us up, and carry us through all opposition when everything else will give way. Sustained by this, where is the mountain of difficulties that will not be brought low,—the Red Sea that will not be opened up before us,—the toil that will not be endured,—the trial that will not be patiently borne,—the sin that will not be overcome,—the evil habit that will not be subdued,—the master passion of the soul, that will not be restrained, or altogether cast out? Whatever be the strain which this spiritual force has to bear in life or in death, it will be equal to it,—ay, and more than that; for here is the testimony of one who had to bear tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, and sword: "Nay in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us." "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me."

VIII. *Christ all, and in all, as the light and the glory of the upper world.*

If as God-man He was all and in all on earth, He is still more so in heaven to the enraptured throng of angels and redeemed men. They see in Him what is to be seen in no other being in the universe—"this same Jesus" wearing our humanity, which is not lost in the divine, but which is in visible union with it, making even that still more glorious. For though in the midst of the throne, He is "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." In heaven He is still the manifested God, the revelation of the Father's love in our nature, now exalted far above all human conception. He has a name which is above every name. On His head are many crowns. The redeemed shall walk with Him in white, for they are worthy, not in themselves, but through the blood of the Lamb. They shall then see as they never did before, how He is all and in all in creation, in providence, and in redeeming love. The echoes of their songs of praise come down to us through all the ages, since the beloved disciple heard them in the island of Patmos. "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing."

He is all and in all to the Eternal Father Himself, who sees in His own Son the brightness of His glory, the express image of His person, the fulness of His own love, and who calls upon the whole universe to worship Him, as the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last. At the Father's behest He is worshipped

by the shining ranks of angels and by the ransomed hosts, who see the King in His beauty, and that Presence is to them the all and in all:—"And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever."

THE HOUSE OF MY GLORY.

"I WILL GLORIFY THE HOUSE OF MY GLORY."

"All the flocks of Kedar shall be gathered together unto thee, the rams of Nebaioth shall minister unto thee: they shall come up with acceptance on mine altar, and I will glorify the house of my glory."—Isaiah lx. 7.

THE HOUSE OF MY GLORY.

WHAT a stately march of glowing prediction is in this chapter, which spreads before us scenes surpassing fable, brighter far than any golden age ever sung by poet, or conceived by imagination in its highest flight! What a wide sweep these words embrace, passing onwards from the days of the prophet, when he stood on the mount of vision, and beheld, in the radiant future, the latter-day glory shedding its brightness on all the nations of the earth, and binding them all together with a zone of gospel light and love.

What house on earth was worthy to be called "the house of my glory," but the temple at Jerusalem? Its splendour, its beautiful proportions were such as to fill every beholder with rapture. The most expensive materials were collected for many years—silver and gold, and precious stones—and when all these were laid out by the most skilful workmanship, under the direction of the Divine Spirit, who brought every part of the structure to the height of beauty, this house stood forth at last in dazzling magnificence, the glory of the whole land. It was not, however, the mere external splendour of the house that invested it with so much interest and attraction, but because it was the divinely chosen scene where the devout wor-

shippers offered to the Father of an Infinite Majesty, the true homage of the heart. It was the place where atonement was made for the sins of the people; where the mercy-seat was sprinkled with blood, and the faith of the pious was pointed to a better sacrifice; where the soul of the nation went up to God in songs of thanksgiving and praise; in short, the spiritual design of the house was its greatest glory. "The Lord is in his holy temple," "strength and beauty are in his sanctuary," "out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God hath shined."

This ancient temple was but the symbol of a more glorious house of God, referred to in these words of the apostle, "Ye are God's building,"—"And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; in whom all the building, fitly framed together, groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord. In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit." "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?" This spiritual edifice is not composed of those material elements which gave such magnificence and beautiful symmetry to the ancient temple, but of "living stones," immortal souls redeemed by the precious blood of Christ, and built upon Him as the sure foundation that can never be moved. What a wide range this gives to the expression, "the house of my glory," and the prediction regarding it! For what can this house be, we now ask, in the face of these Scripture quotations, but the Church of the

living God, consisting of all those who have been gathered out of every kindred, and people, and tongue, and nation, who are baptized into the same Spirit, redeemed by the same precious blood, and held together by the same bond of union? They all acknowledge Christ as their Head, cherish the same faith, and are looking forward to the same inheritance home. They form the Church of the living God, purchased by the blood of the Lamb, the spiritual building described by another apostle in these words—"Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ."

Looking then at the house of God's glory in this extended sense, let us now consider in what respects the promise in the text has been already fulfilled, and what remains of it yet to be accomplished. "I will glorify the house of my glory." Let us view these words in relation to the present and to the future.

I. God fulfils this promise, *by His special presence and protection.*

In the ancient dispensation there were certain visible tokens of His presence, as, for example, the pillar of cloud by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night, which accompanied the hosts of Israel in all their wanderings. It is to this the Hebrew bard refers in the grand old words :—

> "O God, what time Thou did'st go forth
> Before Thy people's face;
> And when through the great wilderness
> Thy glorious marching was."

In the holiest of all, there was the symbol of the divine presence above the mercy-seat and between the cherubims, and therefore Jehovah was thus addressed, "Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, thou that leadest Joseph like a flock: thou that dwellest between the cherubims, shine forth." True, indeed, we have not these outward symbols, but surely we have in a far higher degree, through the ministration of the Holy Spirit, the felt sense of that gracious presence which they signified. Have we not this promise, and is it not fulfilled in the case of every believer?—"If a man love me, he will keep my word: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him." There is the indwelling of the Divine Spirit in every child of God, and therefore in the Church at large, as composed of all who are truly His. Hence the words addressed to the saints at Corinth, "Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you?" No other temple has such a presiding deity, for Christ, the hope of glory, is in the heart of every follower, and each one can truly say that "Christ liveth in me." Let us never forget the Master's own words, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world."

As to the protection which God vouchsafes to the house of His glory, what is the assurance we have of this? Shall not the Almighty guard most jealously its sacred interests? Yes! God hath established His *Zion on the* Rock of Ages, no weapon that is forged

against it shall prosper, the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. He knows His own, and is gathering them from every land, that He may bring them in and have them in His own safe keeping. The temple has long since passed away, and ancient Zion is a heap of ruins, but the city of the living God, the Church of the faithful, "not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ," shall rise above all its enemies, overcome all opposition, and become more glorious than ever, "for upon all the glory shall be a defence." "God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved: God shall help her, and that right early."

The mere material house, however splendid, costly, and strongly built, crumbles into ruins like all earthly things and disappears; but God's spiritual building of redeemed souls can never pass away. It must endure for ever as a standing testimony to His purpose of redeeming mercy, to His gracious presence, and to His protecting love. Believers have the double security of the two-fold promise, which throws around them the loving arms of the Father and of the Son, and the power of the Spirit who has drawn them into this safe hiding-place. The first is, "I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand;" the second is, "My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand." They are sealed by the Spirit of God unto the day of redemption.

II. *By the accomplishment of His great designs, in connection with His Church on earth.*

These may be summed up as follows:—The conversion of souls, the preservation of soul-saving truth, the spread of that truth throughout the world, the instruction and comfort of all God's people, their advance in holiness of heart and life.

1st. *The conversion of souls.* This is the chief glory of the Church, and without this, what has it more to claim, in regard to spiritual interests, than any secular society? There is a moral grandeur in the birth of a soul to a new life. This is specially called the workmanship of God, a new creation—"created anew in Christ, unto good works." The world may see nothing to admire in this great change, but the Saviour has more than once assured us that there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over every soul that is born again, "not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." It is a passing from death unto life, from darkness to light, from the power of sin and Satan into the glorious liberty of the children of God. A child of wrath, an heir of hell, is translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son. There is such a spiritual glory in this change, that when it did take place in the days of the Saviour, we read: "In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit, and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes."

In that sacred ode where the inspired minstrel bursts out into the rapturous words: "Glorious things

are spoken of thee, O city of our God ;"—the highest honour of which he can speak is this : "And of Zion it shall be said, This and that man was born in her : and the highest himself shall establish her." And how? By increasing the number of conversions. In this brief psalm of seven verses, the glory of the new birth is referred to, no fewer than three times. In the verse immediately after the text you observe the question regarding the largely increased number of converts : "Who are these that fly as a cloud, and as the doves to their windows?" The promise has just been uttered by Jehovah : "I will glorify the house of my glory." And now mark the direction in which this glory lies is in a large increase of converts, to the grateful joy and surprise of God's people. In revival seasons, when they themselves are greatly quickened, and the careless are roused, and brought into the fold of mercy, the promise of the text is fulfilled, and all who live and labour for the extension of the Redeemer's kingdom are thereby made glad. This is what the Church and the world so much need. It is for these times of refreshing that we should earnestly pray. "Oh, that the salvation of Israel were come out of Zion! When the Lord bringeth back the captivity of his people, Jacob shall rejoice, and Israel shall be glad." "O Lord, revive thy work in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years make known ; in wrath remember mercy."

2nd. *The preservation of soul-saving truth.* The great King and Head of the Church has committed this precious treasure, as a sacred trust, to His people.

"Hold fast that which thou hast; let no man take thy crown." The glory of the Church is the truth regarding Christ, and Him crucified, as the only ground of the sinner's hope of acceptance with God, and that truth faithfully and lovingly set forth, in the preaching of the everlasting gospel, and pressed upon the hearts and consciences of men. Here again I would ask, What is the Church beyond an ordinary secular society, if this is not its grand distinction? What is the gospel, apart from the blood of Christ, which cleanseth us from all sin? Take this away, and what is there for us to hold by, as an anchor of the soul? Have they not taken away the Lord Himself, and what have they left us? There may be much material splendour and outward pomp, much grandeur and magnificence; there may be a gorgeous and imposing ritual—but what of all this, if the light be only darkness? How great that is! for it is darkness where, of all places in this world, there should be light. Darkness where the highest interests of immortal souls are at stake!

3rd. *The truth of God must not only be preserved by the Church, but diffused.*

Nothing can be more clearly defined, or more strongly urged, than this divine purpose in connection with the Church of Christ. "God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined into our hearts," and for what purpose? That we may shine wherever our lot may be cast, and that we may send the light of life to others. If we cannot carry it ourselves to the dark places of the earth, we can help to send others on this mission of mercy. If we cannot

be the lamp ourselves in a benighted region of the earth, full of the habitations of cruelty, we can help to place the light on some lonely watch-tower, and keep it burning there to guide the feet of the wandering into the way of peace. Saved ourselves, we must surely seek to save others, and to rescue the perishing at home and abroad. Nothing short of this is the purpose of the Master, who has given His people this great commission: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." The gospel for the world, and the world for Christ! What a moral grandeur there is in such a purpose as this! The Church is glorified just as she rises in the strength of her Lord to carry it out. If the evils that lie so heavily upon the crushed heart of the nation are ever to be removed, it must be by the Church of the living God rising in her might and majesty to the full height of her mission. It is the purpose of God that she should do so, and when she does, the promise will have a remarkable fulfilment—"I will glorify the house of my glory."

Notwithstanding all its imperfections, and they are many, shattered and divided as the Church, alas! is, to its own hurt, and to the boastful triumph of its enemies, weak and wavering as it seems to be, in presence of such gigantic evils, far, far, from carrying out its great mission of mercy as it ought to do, unfaithful to the sacred trust committed to it, by its great King and Head; admitting all this, it must at the same time be affirmed—and we do so with confidence—that the Church of Christ is the only agency that is really

seeking to bless the world, in the highest sense, and which is keeping this great end constantly in view. Destroy this divinely appointed Institution, remove it altogether, were this possible, and society would be shaken to its centre, the very foundations of social order would be swept away; the enemy would come in like a flood, and there would be none to lift up a standard against him, the worst passions of men would be let loose, the most frightful evils to a large extent would be unrestrained, and lawless violence and disorder would be the inevitable result.

4th. *According to the purpose of God, the Church should be the well-spring of blessing to the world, especially to all seeking souls.*

"Blessed are they that dwell in thy house: they will be still praising thee." "Therefore with joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation."

O Zion! City of our God, thou art a quiet resting-place to many weary, foot-sore pilgrims, on their journey to the better land. The maimed, the halt, and the blind, who have waited at the pools of thy consolation, have seen the King in His beauty, and have gone away rejoicing in the healing power of the Great Physician. The hard heart has been melted, the fierce passions of man's nature subdued, the cold, selfish, and worldly soul has been brought into a more genial atmosphere, the grovelling spirit of "The Man with the Muck-rake" has been made to look up, and see the Shining One standing over him with the crown in His hand, and has yielded, ere it was too late, to the imploring and melting gaze of divine love. This is none

other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven, where many have entered upon a new life with fear and trembling, where the jaded pilgrim has been refreshed and has taken heart again for the rest of his journey. "Open to me the gates of righteousness: I will go into them, and I will praise the Lord."

5th. *The Church glorified by the beauty of holiness.*

There must be purity before there is power to bring the world to the feet of Jesus. There is a series of very remarkable prayers in that psalm of sorrow, in which there are so many allusions to the frailty of human life. "Let thy work appear unto thy servants, and thy glory unto their children." What is this divine glory that is prayed for? We have the answer in the petition that follows, "And let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us." What is this but the beauty of holiness? And when the people of God appear in this, the glory of sanctifying grace is seen in their lives, and the work which they are honoured then to do for God is confirmed thereby. Thus the next prayer is, "Establish thou the work of our hands upon us!" There is no greater confirmation of Christian work than the seal set to it by a holy life. This is the noblest testimony that can be borne to it. The very children feel its power, and the blessed influence passes from sire to son. Purity will give spiritual strength, such as the world must feel. The enemies of our Lord, who came to seize Him, went backwards and fell to the ground, because suddenly brought face to face with Spotless Innocence. Many evils that are amongst us could not possibly stand up unabashed

were the shining garments of holiness worn on all occasions by the followers of Christ. "All that see them shall acknowledge them, that they are the seed which the Lord hath blessed." And why? "For he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation; he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness."

III. *As to the future, God will complete the glory of His house in the heavenly world.*

The glory will then be at its height, the perfection of beauty will then be reached. The promise of God in the text has been so far fulfilled in the present world, but it is yet to have a far higher and more glorious fulfilment in the mansions above, when all His ransomed family, that were scattered here, shall be gathered into one. "Evening brings all home" is a phrase that thrills my heart. And when the evening of the world shall have come, and when the purpose of God shall complete its course, that swept on and on through all the successive ages of time; when the light of eternity shall dawn, and the shadows of this world shall flee away, then shall the ransomed of the Lord, in a far higher sense than did the captives of Judah, return and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads—and not one shall be left behind. "With gladness and rejoicing shall they be brought: they shall enter into the king's palace." What a glorious vision now rises before us, as we pass the boundaries of time into the future world, and behold the finished purpose of God, in the great multitudes that have been gathered from all parts of the earth,

"clothed with white robes, and with palms in their hands." Then shall God, in the highest sense of the promise, "glorify the house of his glory;" for the words of the prophet, descriptive of the destiny that is before this house, conduct us beyond this world, and place us amid the shining ones, around the throne. "Thy sun shall no more go down; neither shall thy moon withdraw itself: for the Lord shall be thine everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended." "The exceeding and eternal weight of glory!" what that is, who can tell? Eye hath not seen, ear hath not heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man, to conceive what it really is. Everything that is bright, and fair, and pure, and beautiful, like the King Himself, will be there, to give the last divine touches of infinite wisdom and love to the home of the blessed. In the glad anticipation of this, well might the saintly Rutherford sing—

"Amid the shades of evening,
While sinks life's lingering sand,
I hail the glory dawning
From Immanuel's land."

And if the dawn be such as to fill us now with rapture, what will the resplendent noon of heaven be, the perfect day, when there shall be nothing more to add to the shining temple of God,

"Where glory, glory dwelleth,
In Immanuel's land?"

This subject has a most important bearing upon every believer, as to Christian activity, personal holiness, and perseverance unto the end. There is

nothing upon earth that so draws to it the heart of God in deepest sympathy and love, as "the house of his glory," the Church of the redeemed. It should therefore be to us the highest honour and the greatest privilege to be connected with it as "living stones," not passive but active Christians, taking a deep interest in its peace, purity, prosperity, and good order. "Peace be within thee. Because of the house of the Lord our God I will seek thy good."

There are several important questions in connection with this topic, which should come home to us all. "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" that I too may have some part in the fulfilment of the promise, "I will glorify the house of my glory." What have I done towards this great end; what am I doing now? Let us seek to realise more and more the grand purposes which God designs to serve by the Church in the world. One of these is, that we should cling to the truth which He has given us, for the soul's highest interests. "Let us hold fast the form of sound words;" and amid all the weary unrest, and the strife of tongues, let us ever find rest in Christ and Him crucified, as the home of our hearts. Let us seek to spread that precious truth as God gives us the ability and the opportunity. "Let him that heareth say, Come." Let us ever bear in mind that God's house is glorified by the personal holiness of believers. This is "the beauty of the Lord." Let us seek to shine more and more in it, by a consistent, holy life, adorning "the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things," and thus be fellow-workers with God, in adding to the glory of

that "house," for which He spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up to the death for us all.

Let the prospect of completed glory in heaven, and of sharing in it, fire us with holy zeal and ardour, to be more like Christ Himself, the foundation on which the building rests. Amid all the trials of the present life, let us hold fast the profession of our faith, without wavering, firm unto the end. With the glory of the temple shining from afar, and with the fragrant odours of the land of Beulah wafted to us even here—the land breeze that betokens the nearness of home, let us possess our souls in patience, for the day of our redemption draweth nigh. "Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates of the city;" where God shall glorify the house of His glory with the perfection of beauty, for "the glory of God shall lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof." "As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness."

THE MINISTRY OF FLOWERS.

"THE FLOWERS APPEAR ON THE EARTH."

"For, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone; the flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land."—Solomon's Song ii. 11, 12.

THE MINISTRY OF FLOWERS.

IT is with no ordinary pleasure that I call your attention to this passage of Scripture to-day, in gratitude to God, for bringing us again to the "leafy month of June," the gladdest and the greenest of all the months of the year, and the one which is perhaps the brightest with flowers. This world is full of beauty, if our eyes were only open to see it; and the flowers that spring up in our path everywhere in the country, at this season, do much to fill the earth with the spirit of the beautiful, and the hearts of all with a sense of its presence and its purifying power.

I rejoice greatly in the increased attention that is now paid to the cultivation of flowers, especially in the humbler walks of life. To the working-man this is a recreation which cannot fail to exert a refining influence on his heart and conduct. Little garden plots are common even in some parts of the city, but more so in the suburbs; and these are a source of great delight in the long summer evenings, or on the Saturday afternoons, to many an artisan and his family, who may have first acquired a taste for flowers in the country, and who happily have not lost it amid all the deadening influences of city life.

It is pleasing also to see so many window gardens,

tastefully got up, and bright with ferns and flowers, for this is one of the surest signs that the hearts which feel an interest in these can be touched to finer issues —they are in tune with Nature, and are susceptible of good impressions. The mignonnette carefully tended because a sick or dying sister dearly loves it, the straggling creeper, the bit of sweetly-scented wallflower, or pale green southern-wood in the ornamental box at the window of that poor dwelling, are the hopeful tokens of something good in the home circle, of freshness in the heart, which will keep it young, and of that refinement of feeling, which clings to the memories of the country. Depend upon it, all this is of priceless value to the humblest abode, even in the most crowded and unsavoury part of the city.

Last June, you remember, I called your attention to this subject, taking as our text the words of our Saviour, "Consider the lilies of the field." No one delighted in these more than He did. His love for Nature was intense, and so He took every fitting opportunity to awaken the interest of His hearers in the lovely flowers that decked the valley or gemmed the hillside, and from them He never failed to draw homely and memorable illustrations of the great truths which He taught.

The Song, from which I have selected the text, is, above all other books in the Bible, full of the poetry of flowers; and my earnest prayer is, that I may be so guided to speak of them to-day, that your walks in the country at this blithesome period, when

you renew your delightful communings with Nature, may be more and more to you all a source of spiritual blessing. It would have been quite in keeping with our subject if this platform had been adorned with some of the lovely flowers that are now bursting into full bloom and beauty. Why not? There would have been no ritualism in this, surely, but simple illustrations of the truth contained in the text, brought from the wide field of Nature itself, and in harmony with the Saviour's own injunction, "Consider the lilies of the field;" or with the words that waft to us from afar the very breath of Spring—"The flowers appear on the earth." What are some of the lessons that we may gather from these?

I. "*The flowers appear on the earth,*" *in token of the wisdom and goodness of our Heavenly Father.*

This world might have been made our habitation, so as that it could not have yielded a solitary flower, from one end of it to the other, or during any one of its revolving months. Spring might have come without bringing a single snowdrop, and without a primrose peeping out from the shaggy cliff in the glen, or by the burn-side. But what would spring be, without her early flowers, or summer without her garland of beauty, or autumn without her blooming heather, or any blossoms to brighten the departing year? Man might have had, so far, a comfortable enough physical existence, apart altogether from these. Doubtless he could have lived, although he had never seen any flower. But would not our lives

have been very much poorer, had there not been even one to brighten our path? For they minister so much to the sense of the beautiful, and life is made all the sweeter by their fragrance.

What if the green fields, so pleasing, and refreshing to the weary eye, had been black, or altogether yellow? Mere existence could still have been sustained and prolonged notwithstanding, but under what disadvantages compared with the present state of things. It has pleased our Beneficent Creator, to make the fields green, and they are always as such in themselves, a great joy; but would not this have been greatly diminished, had there been no flowers to vary the one unchanging colour? Instead of this, however, these fair creations of God meet us everywhere; in sunshine and shade, in the open field, and the thick forest, in every nook and corner, at our feet, and far above overhead; and the gowany lea is made bright in the spring and summer, as the deep blue sky at night is made to sparkle with stars.

The great God who has spread these sweet tokens of His goodness and wisdom everywhere, will not be unmindful of His people; and so our blessed Lord urges His hearers to put their trust in the Almighty, who carpets the earth with flowers, and who therefore will surely provide, as a Father, for all the earthly wants of His children. Most tenderly does He entreat them not to give way to anxious worries and harassing cares, but to cast themselves in simple trust on His unfailing faithfulness and love. "Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to-day is, and

to-morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?"

II. "*The flowers appear on the earth*" *in wonderful variety and profusion, to assure us of the exhaustless fulness that is in God.*

The largest picture gallery never presented anything approaching the variety that may be found in a flower-garden of ordinary dimensions, or in a conservatory, where, within the space of a few yards, you have almost endless variety in form and colour. Take the orchids for example, or a flower that is better known to us all, the violet, and in these two specimens alone, you have an all but exhaustless world of beauty. But you do not require a conservatory, or a garden skilfully laid out and carefully tended, by way of illustration. How delightful to walk on the upland moors, at early morn or dewy eve, where the scented thyme, so fragrant and so bonnie, hangs like ringlets over the brow of some divot-covered dyke, or fringes, with a very dower of beauty, long, sandy tracts of nature's waste places, making the very barest corners blush with the bright clusters of purple blossoms. The air is heavy with the delicious scent of the bog-myrtle, the birch, the pine, the honeysuckle, and the bell-heather, bursting into bloom, and, above all, with the white clover, from which the bees go humming homeward, laden with their golden treasures. Almost any field, any quiet glen—sweet spot for lonely musing—any haugh, hillside, or bosky dell, where the wild flowers in the grass form a lovely piece of mosaic-work,

or where they fringe the banks of the wimpling burn, will open to you, in one afternoon's excursion, a new world of rich and varied treasure. Anyone who knows their names can never fail to have pleasant companionship in his summer rambles, and pure and exalted joys at his command. Though silent, they have a language of their own to his heart, and in fellowship with them he cannot feel lonely. They will lead his thoughts to the Saviour, to whom a child and a flower were always objects of deepest interest. His hand has spread them in rich profusion by the door steps of cottages, in the little garden plots, and green lanes around them, as well as on the soft turf of the broad avenue leading to the lordly mansion, or on the wide-spreading lawn with the fine back-ground of forest trees in the distance. Flowers everywhere! Yes,

"For where He vital breathes, there must be joy;"

and He that said, "Consider the lilies of the field," has expressed the joy of His own heart in the beauty, variety, and profusion of flowers, by which He desires to make others glad. We have a striking illustration of how the smallest flower blooming alone in the desert-waste may cheer the heart of the bravest man amid the most depressing surroundings, and nerve him to new efforts. When Mungo Park, the distinguished African traveller was stripped of all his possessions, and left as he thought, in the despair of the moment, to die in the desert, he received a sudden impulse from a very unexpected quarter, which enabled him to rise to the occasion. Hopeless and

alone, he had all but resigned himself to his fate, when his eye chanced to fall upon a lovely little flower, that opened its bright leaves amid the sand where he lay, in as despondent a state of mind as was the prophet Elijah, when he threw himself under the juniper tree, and wished that he might die. That tiny flower was the traveller's good angel, his star of hope in the wide waste, and seemed to whisper to him, "Be of good cheer; the hand that has placed me here, and which has preserved me in life and beauty, in these dry and parched sands, will not leave you to die." The traveller lifted up his heart to the great God, took courage, went forward, and soon found to his delight that the much-needed help was at hand. Truly he might have said in a higher sense than even the poet did—

> "To me the meanest flower that blows can give
> Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears."

So is it with the Christian pilgrim in the journey of life, cast down at times, but not destroyed; faint, yet pursuing, he can draw from the exhaustless fulness of God, and pillow his weary head on the promises, "My grace is sufficient for thee; for my strength is made perfect in weakness;" "My God shall supply all your need, according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus."

III. "*The flowers appear on the earth,*" *as so many tokens of God's love of the beautiful.*

How could it be otherwise, when He is the Soul and the Author of all that is bright and fair?

"Thou art, O God, the life and light
Of all this wondrous world we see;
Its glow by day, its smile by night,
Are but reflections caught from Thee!
Where'er we turn, Thy glories shine,
And all things fair and bright are Thine."

Who has an eye for the beautiful like God? Who ever saw into the soul of beauty in these flowers as the Saviour Himself did? May I venture, with all reverence, to apply the expression to Christ—the Divine Artist? or to ask, Who can paint like God?

"The rose of Sharon," and "the lily of the valleys," derive all their loveliness from Him. This is beyond the reach of all human art or colouring, and the same may be affirmed of myriads of others, that have not found a place on the sacred page; but they are sown all over the earth, as so many shining pearls dropped from the hand of God. Theirs is a beauty that touches the hearts of all—the old man, as well as the little child. God grant that the sight of them may impress us all more and more with the vast importance of moral and spiritual beauty, so that we may all become more Christ-like; for when we look upon the loveliest flower that He has made, may we not see "the King in His beauty"? It is reflected in the flowers, not in the highest sense, certainly; but they would not be what they are, were it not for His divine touch, which has given them all their hues, and all that sweet odour which makes the air at times like a breath from the Land of Beulah.

Special mention is made in this Song of two flowers —"the rose of Sharon," and "the lily of the valleys;"

and if these names are designed to apply to Christ, it must surely be so, that we may think of the beauty of His moral perfections, and strive to be like Him in the lustrous purity of the new life which, as manifested by us, must in some degree resemble His own; for "our life is hid with Christ in God." If, on the other hand, "the rose of Sharon," and "the lily of the valleys," are, in some respects, emblems of the believer, then all that is fair and attractive in the Christian life, everything that is pure, and lovely, and honest, and of good report, must come from Him, who paints the rose—

"And decks the lily fair in flowery pride."

All the beauty that is in the brightest flower is but a faint reflection from Him, and all that is morally attractive in the life of the believer is but the same. The time, however, is coming, and to some of us it may not be far off, "when we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is."

We all admire the beauty of flowers; let us rise from them to the Great Source of the beautiful Himself—"The chief among ten thousand, and altogether lovely." So intense was His desire to see the soul of man adorned in the beauty of holiness, that He gave His life, that through His precious blood, it might be cleansed from every stain, and made worthy to walk with Him in white.

IV. "*The flowers appear on the earth*" *as emblems of an unselfish nature.*

What a rebuke the flower is to a selfish soul! It gives

all its colours to the eye, all its beauty to the hand that will take it, all its fragrance to the breeze till the air is laden with the sweet perfume—it keeps back nothing that it can give. It lives by yielding its life to please others, and when there is not a single eye to look upon it but that of the great Creator, it gives back all it can yield to the eye that delights in it, and to the hand that made it. It lives to please, and dies when it can do no more! Beautiful emblem this of the love of Christ in the complete surrender of Himself for the good of others. In Him dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead bodily, and all this, as far as it was needed, was given for man that he might be redeemed from the curse of sin, and made a partaker of a new life. Christ gave all that His sinless human nature could give in union with the divine; "He emptied himself," He withheld nothing that was required for our salvation; He laid down His life for the sheep. The flower in its unselfishness is at best but a very faint emblem of our Saviour's love and self-denial in behalf of our guilty race, but nevertheless let us look upon it as such, and when we see it yield its life to please and to charm the senses, let us think of Him who gave up all that, as God and man, He could give, in order that He might impart to us His own spirit, and clothe us with His own beauty. The flower gives its life to please, but Christ gave His life to bless, His blood to cleanse; for us He offered Himself without spot unto God. "He loved me and gave Himself for me." What is our duty? "Freely ye have received, freely give."

V. "*The flowers appear on the earth*," *and speedily pass away, to remind us of our frailty.*

What an appropriate emblem of the fleeting life of man, who "cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down."

> "To-day he puts forth
> The tender leaves of hope, to-morrow blossoms
> And bears his blushing honours thick upon him :
> The third day comes a frost, a killing frost ;
> And,—when he thinks good easy man ! full surely
> His greatness is a ripening—nips his root
> And then he falls."

This thought, so beautifully expressed by the great dramatist, was probably suggested by the words of the prophet—"All flesh *is* grass, and all the goodliness thereof *is* as the flower of the field : the grass withereth, the flower fadeth." This is true in the experience of every one, and the sad illustrations of it are as numerous as the flowers themselves. How many graves are strewn with those tokens of affection at this moment? But the fairest flowers lie beneath.

During my last holiday season, which I spent in Strathspey, I walked along the banks of the noble river that gives its name to that lovely district, till I reached the magnificent beech trees at Cromdale Churchyard. What a quiet resting-place for the dead, who lie buried, beside the rushing river! It was a calm Saturday night, and everything but the river seemed to be standing still. I went over the stile, and seated myself under the wide-spreading branches of one of the beeches, the largest, probably, of its kind in our country. I thought at first that no one was

present, but in a little I saw two young women placing garlands of beautiful fresh flowers on lately made graves. I felt that I could not intrude upon them at such a sacred moment, so full of stillness at the close of the week, and when their hearts and hands were engaged in such a holy work of love. Silently they withdrew over the stile, from the graves where they had left their flowers, tokens, at once, of fondly cherished memories, warm affections, and our common frailty. I went and stood at the graves, which they had just left, and there lay the garlands, which would soon fade, fitting emblems of that life which is also compared to a "vapour that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away."

This touching incident at Cromdale reminded me of a similar one which I witnessed, on a Saturday evening also, in the burying-ground around the old Cathedral in Trondhjem in Norway. Many came that night to renew the flowers on the graves for the coming week. Mothers were decking little graves; children were placing garlands on those of their parents; here and there we saw the lone widow with an orphan child, and every face was stamped with the unuttered sorrow of the words—

> "Oh for the touch of a vanished hand,
> And the sound of a voice that is still!"

VI. "*The flowers appear on the earth,*" *to cheer us with the hope of the Resurrection morn.*

The balmy breath of Spring awakens the flowers again, and at her bidding they come forth, when the

face of the earth is renewed. Death is not an eternal sleep; the grave is not one long, unbroken winter. It shall also have its blessed spring-time; and surely the flowers that come forth, and burst into beauty at the reviving breath of the opening year, are sent to remind us of this. The analogy is at least in harmony with the teaching of Scripture: "It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: it is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality, . . . then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory."

Standing one day in February in a quiet burying-ground in a sweet country parish, I was much struck with the touching inscription on the headstone of a little grave, and still more so when I looked at the mound itself. Snowdrops, as pure as the snow from which they were peeping forth, were springing up all over the sod, tokens to me not only of approaching spring to the earth, but of a still more blessed spring-time to the grave itself. The dust that lay below was that of a dearly-loved child, an early-gathered flower, like a rose nipped in the bud; but the white bells of the snowdrops on the grave had sweet music in them to my heart, and their chime seemed to be this—"Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust: for thy dew is as the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead."

When speaking of His own death and resurrection, the Saviour uttered these words, "Except a corn of

wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." So shall it be with all who fall asleep in Jesus. They are frail like the passing flowers, and therefore they fall and die; but it is so, that mortality may be swallowed up of life.

These remarks on the "Ministry of Flowers" would be incomplete were I not to make a parting reference to the benefits conferred on many a sick and weary one by the "Flower Mission" which has been recently formed among us, and which has called forth many willing workers, who feel that this is just the very kind of work for which they are best adapted. It is pleasant on certain days of the week, during the season of flowers, to see the large number of tastefully-arranged bouquets sent in from many gardens in the country to the place of meeting, and distributed to those who are ready to carry them to the various wards of our Infirmaries, or to homes in the city, where the sick are longing to receive them. The gift costs but little; but how much it is prized by those who are confined to beds of sickness, some of whom are waiting in the valley till the Lord shall call them home. Each bouquet contains as great a variety as possible, and has an ornamental card attached to it, on which is written or printed an appropriate passage of Scripture. The fairest flowers soon wither, "but the word of the Lord endureth for ever;" and the text has been fondly cherished in many a heart, and has cheered many a sufferer long after the blossoms have faded.

Enter that sick-room with me; look at the sweet

smile that spreads over the pale face of that young woman as we place the flowers in her hand. She gazes at them with tears of grateful emotion. The little room is filled with fragrance, and her heart with joy. She reads the verse, and from the expression of her face it is evident that it is a word in season: "The gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." She has received the flowers as a gift; has she received Christ as her Saviour? Her look of satisfaction speaks of an inward peace, which shows that she is "accepted in the Beloved." On the day following we return, but the weary sufferer is at rest, and we are shown into the chamber of death. The flowers have all withered, but we see the card that accompanied them, laid on her breast; and a new significance is given to it, as we see it lying on the shroud, and read the text, which has been printed on it, by some loving hand—"The gift of God is eternal life." The whole family got a blessing from the Flower Mission, and for the sake of the dead that text will be treasured as a sacred memento, and will ever be regarded with special interest.

Pass with me into another dwelling where a young man is dying of decline. His wife, still younger, has her first-born baby at her breast. I observe an anxious look on the face of the dying father, and he earnestly requests that his child be baptized. He cannot rise, he is even so weak that we cannot prop him up in the bed. We lay the infant across his arms, that are folded on his breast, and tears fill his eyes, and the little one receives a baptism of tears. How

happy the father looks, as we present him with some flowers before we leave, and read to him the text that appears on the beautiful card—"Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." He asks us to sing the hymn, "Oh think of the home over there!" With trembling voice he joins in here and there, but the voice of his young wife, as she tries to take a part, is choked with sobs, for she knows that she will soon be a widow, and that her infant, whom she presses to her breast, will be a fatherless bairn. With unutterable affection the dying man regards his wife and child, and in a low muttered prayer earnestly commends them to a covenant-keeping God. In whispers he tells her to be of good cheer. "The Lord will provide for you and the bairn, and the crown of life will soon be mine. O lassie! meet me in glory." A few days brought the struggle to a close. The text is carefully preserved as a sacred relic in the young widow's Bible, and every time it is read it cannot fail to recall the touching scene.

This is a ministry of love that has brought glimpses of blessed sunshine to many a sick chamber, to many a weary heart, and the good that it has done the day only will declare. Here is a door of Christian usefulness that has been recently opened, and who may not enter in, and carry with them the beautiful flowers, that are tokens of a spirit still more beautiful in the sight of God? the Christ-like spirit of love, to the exercise of which we are encouraged by His own kind words—"Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these, my brethren, ye have done it unto me."

THE AXE AND THE ALTAR.

"*A man* was famous, according as he had lifted up axes upon the thick trees."—Psalm lxxiv. 5.

THE AXE AND THE ALTAR.

THERE is a strange obscurity and indefiniteness about the man referred to in the text. He passes before us as a shadow from the far past. The words that describe him seem to fall upon our ear like echoes from a great distance. He is not only nameless, but you observe that the two words which begin the verse are not in the original, and so they are printed in italics, to denote this. All that we gather from the words is, that some one lived long ago, and did a certain important work for which he received a place in the records of immortal fame.

The text resembles an ancient tombstone, in an old burial-place. You eagerly bend over that relic of a by-gone age, to make out some of the words, that are much worn away, and, after scraping the moss and the gray lichens out of the deep-cut letters, you perhaps succeed in reading a portion of the inscription.

Shall we regard the text as an epitaph on the head-stone of some worker for God and the good of man, long, long ago? If so, we shall only find but the merest fragment of a sentence, which you have to complete by supplying the first two words, as our translators did, when they bent over it, as it were, on

hands and knees, to read it. They found no name, and, in order to make sense of the broken record, they had to prefix two words—"*a man*;" for his name, whatever it was, has been lost to us, but not to God, in the dim shadows of the past.

If the name, however, has been worn away by reason of very age, enough remains on the old head-stone to set clearly before us the work, the motive, and the reward of this ancient worker.

I. *His work.*

The man whose work is referred to in the text wrought with his axe, and he stands out in striking contrast with those who, in the next verse, are spoken of, after this wise:—"But now they break down the carved work thereof at once with axes and hammers." They were bent on destruction, and they wreaked their vengeance and fury on the Temple at Jerusalem. The most beautiful specimens of carved work in it had no charms for them, so as to turn aside their ruthless hands in the work of demolition. It was the saying of an ancient conqueror, when he was implored by the people of Rhodes to spare a famous painting, that he would sooner burn the statue of his father, than injure so great a work of art. But the barbarians who were guilty of the gross and wanton outrages described in this Psalm, cared nothing for the beauty of the Temple, or the highest workmanship of human skill and genius which it contained. Their spirit is expressed in the words, "Rase it, rase it, even to the *foundation* thereof." Very different from this was the

spirit and the conduct of the man who "lifted up his axes," not upon the carved work of the Temple, but upon the "thick trees" of the wood, not to destroy, but to build up, and to make beautiful. If he felled trees, it was that he might furnish fitting materials for the skilful architect and the ingenious workman. In order that we may get *this man* and his work fairly placed before us, we must throw our minds back to the period when the Temple was, as yet, only a bright conception in the mind of King David. He dwelt in his own splendid cedar house, while the ark of the Lord abode in a tent with curtains! It had, therefore, long been the earnest desire of his heart to build a magnificent house for the service of God. He encouraged all the people to make great preparations for this, and he set them a noble example of generous giving. A minute account of their profuse liberality is given in that chapter, where all the gifts, from the highest to the lowest in the nation, are set out in splendid array, to the grateful surprise of all who beheld them, and to none more than to the king himself. No "hills of prey," no trophies or spoils from the battle-field, ever pleased him half so much as the magnificent offerings of his people for the building of the Temple, and in the gladness of his heart he exclaimed, "Now therefore, our God, we thank thee, and praise thy glorious name." There was nothing that so touched his heart on that memorable day as did the *humble peasant*, who offered himself and his axe to help in the great work, to the completion of which the nation had joyfully pledged itself. He had

no gold, or silver, or precious stones to bring: it may have been that he had little or nothing of material substance at his command; but he had strength in his brawny arm, and he gave himself, his time and his labour, and all the ardour of a loving heart to the good cause. Now he is on his way to the stately cedars with a fixed purpose clearly set in his face; he selects those that are best fitted for the roof, or for beams, or pillars, or for the doors, or other finer parts of the work that must be carved with great taste and care; and if he can do nothing else for the national undertaking, he can at least do the rough work of felling trees. There in the forest you see him stripped, and at it with all his might, and down through the ages come the echoes of his ringing axe, as his sturdy strokes fall on the "thick trees," and the giants are one by one laid prostrate at his feet.

II. *His motive.*

Nothing is said about this in the text, but we may rest assured that his work would never have found a place in the sacred minstrelsy of the ancient Church, had there not been underlying it all a noble motive. It is for his work, and not for his name, that he was famous, so the one is prominently set before us, while the other has passed into oblivion. What was it that made him swing his axe over his broad shoulder, and go into the forest, and there continue day after day at his hard task? We have the answer in the words of the king himself, which this man could doubtless have *employed* to express the motive which prompted him

to action—"Because I have set my affection to the house of my God." In these words we have the true secret of his enthusiasm and devotion, and the power that nerved his arm to work. He was amongst the number who could say with truth, "I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord;" and often had he gone thither, "unto the testimony of Israel, to give thanks unto the name of the Lord." But as yet all the glory connected with the solemn gathering of the tribes to the sanctuary service was confined to a tent, which was constructed of frail and perishable materials, designed to be merely temporary, and which was suited only for a transition period. But now that the tribes were united under one head, the kingdom established, and the country prosperous, it was felt that this structure should be superseded by one in every way more worthy of the nation itself, and of the homage due to Him whose presence fills heaven and earth, and who had now given His people rest after all their weary wanderings. When the king made known to the chiefs of the tribes his earnest desire to build a temple for the service of Jehovah; and when he took the people into his confidence, and called upon them to aid in the great work, a new impulse was given to the patriotism and the piety of the whole nation. The spirit of enthusiasm spread through the land, and fired by it, "our man," as we delight to call him on account of the indefinite language of the text, and the special liking we have for such a representative of his class, was prepared to lay his axe, at least, on the altar of the

public weal, and to devote his time and his strength to the service of the God of his fathers.

It was the cause of God in the land that made him stand forth, and which brought him out of obscurity, just as it has done with many others in seasons of religious awakening, when the peasant and the artisan have come nobly forward to fight side by side, and generously to give of their substance for what was dearer to them than life itself. Thank God! our own country can furnish many memorable illustrations of this. It was the peasant and the artisan class that stood by Knox, and gave the first great impulse to the Reformation work in the land. They had already gained the country for Christ and His truth, when the nobles were still half asleep, or selfishly plotting for their own ends. If the common people are not roused to action in the interests of true godliness, the heart of the nation will never be stirred to that combined effort, which must ever be put forth to secure any permanent good, and to give vitality and stability to any great religious movement. It is, therefore, a pleasing picture to us, to see "our man" with his axe, which he consecrates most heartily to the cause of righteousness and truth. The work he does with it is not for personal or selfish ends, but for the nation; yea, for the world—for God Himself. It is this that gives surpassing dignity to every stroke, and makes him stand out on the page of the sacred record as a striking example of unselfish service, and true, honest work. He might have said of his axe, as truly as *Gideon* did of his sword, when he rushed into the

thick of the fight:—"The sword of the Lord and of Gideon!" That axe was as much devoted to the Lord, as was the sword of the ancient hero. The motive for action in both cases was the same. The work was for God and for His holy house, that was to be the joy of the whole land, and the great gathering place of all the tribes, for the solemnities of their holy faith. It was so much time and strength and labour given to the cause of God, with which the best interests of any country are inseparably bound up. The power of his weapon for good lay in the consecration of the man himself to a noble service, and in the love which he had in his heart for the real good of his country. He could not see the Cross, nor draw his motives for action from Calvary, as it is now our privilege to do; but the same grand impelling force of love to God, and to His righteous cause, brought him to the front, and made him one of God's heroes in humble life. Noble deeds will now be done worthy of himself and the class he represents. The people come forward to "a man," and their glowing hearts, their unity and devotion, and the power of the pious motive which animates the whole, are thrown into the foreground, in the outstanding picture of the man and his axe. The armorial bearing becoming such a man is a hand grasping this weapon, and with these words on the scroll:—"For my country and my God!" Constrained to united action by such a motive power, what will a man not accomplish? what will a people not dare to do in the cause of freedom and righteousness, when they rise in their might?

III. *His reward.*

1st. This he received, in the noble enthusiasm with which he inspired others. Such a man could not but have a large following. He was from the people, and many of his comrades, animated by a similar spirit, went forth with him to do valiant things. We see the result of his example in that remarkable chapter, in which we read again and again that the people offered themselves willingly for the building of the Temple; and now, long after that memorable day, we find the secret of this willingness, which exceeded the most sanguine anticipations of the king, in the fact which most unexpectedly meets us in this psalm. It is, indeed, astonishing what one man will do, when his heart is on fire with a noble purpose, he will kindle it in others, who will be prepared to follow him as the leading spirit. His gleaming axe, ready for use, will bring many into the field. The man who can move others for good has received a great gift, and when he makes use of it he has his reward in the number of enthusiastic followers he draws into the same path.

2nd. In the consciousness that he was doing good. The commendation of one's own conscience, and the sunshine of God's approving smile, are no small part of the reward connected with any work of faith or labour of love.

Deep were the forests in which the woodman wrought for God and his fellow-men; dense was the covering of green leaves, but the dazzling rays found an entrance, amid the opening glades, here and there, *and fell like* shimmering gold upon the stately trunks

and the wide-spreading branches. What beautiful sun-pictures were there! These made the man's heart glad at his work, and now and again he bursts out into one of the old songs of Zion. Be this as it may, at this distance, I seem to hear "our man" singing at his work, especially when he has placed his foot on another prostrate cedar, and he makes the forest sunny and cheerful, for God is with him, and he has the re-assuring sense that he has done his duty. He reminds me of the true and honest work done at the forge of the blacksmith—

> "Toiling, rejoicing, sorrowing,
> Onward through life he goes;
> Each morning sees some task begun,
> Each evening sees it close;
> Something attempted, something done,
> Has earned a night's repose."

The sun would set, and his bright beams would pass away, and leave the wood in darkness, but the sunshine of the soul, which that man enjoyed, was a lasting presence—a radiance that would not be withdrawn, for it came from the Sun of Righteousness with healing in trouble, and with peace when work was to be done amid distractions and cares—a picture this, in the man's heart, that would remain for ever. It is then that the joy of the Lord is your strength, and in weakness you are made strong.

3rd. In the sacred memorial of the text. The work done was in an ancient forest far away from this, and at a time that is now far removed from us, and in the depths of the past; but there stands "our man," like

a pictorial gem, snatched from the destroying hand of time. There it shines in God's immortal page, as fresh as the very morning when he left his home, and all the dear ones there, and went out to the scene of his labour, brushing the dew from the grass as he strode along to his daily toil in the golden sunshine of that early hour. Mighty warriors were marching to battle at the head of their conquering armies, in all the glittering panoply of war; monarchs were holding high levee, amid the shining ranks of princes, chiefs, and courtiers. All these have been passed over without notice, and they have gone down into oblivion, but the eye of the all-seeing God rested with complacency on that humble man going to his "day's darg," and the Divine Spirit has selected him and his axe, and given them both a sacred place on the scroll of immortal renown. He seems to have been alike unconscious of his influence and his fame. Never for a moment did he dream that every stroke he gave awoke an echo that would never die, but would sound on for ever to his praise, and carry that to the remotest parts of the earth. Many ages have passed since the ringing of the axe died away amongst the trees, but the memorial of the work done by it shall last for ever. The Temple has long since vanished—not one stone has been left upon another, the cedars are no more a crown of glory to Lebanon, but here the enduring monument of a good work done stands before our eyes to-day, in this one immortal verse, which shall be read by all succeeding generations till *the end of time.*

In one of the museums on the Capitol of Rome a special apartment has been reserved for the world-renowned statue of the Dying Gladiator. It was dug out from a mass of ruins, and there the figure now lies, bearing the stamp of true genius! The expression of the death-agony is still upon that face, which moves you to pity, and you actually feel as if you were in the presence of the *dying* rather than of the *dead*. Few things have more deeply impressed me than this marvellous piece of sculpture, and the power which it has to touch human hearts after the lapse of so many ages. It was very striking to witness the effect produced upon group after group who entered the apartment. They walked softly, and spoke in whispers, as if in some august presence, and gazed with wonder and admiration, not unmixed with a certain feeling of awe, on this creation of genius. Some moved slowly round it again and again, as if they could not tear themselves away. Two or three, I observed, stooped to examine the face more minutely on their knees. I said to myself, "This, surely, is the immortality of genius!" The name of the sculptor is unknown: it has perished, and cannot be recalled from any record of the past, but here is his work, which cannot fail to touch hearts, and to draw thousands from all lands, as long as the marble will endure.

"Our nameless man" has left no embodied form of genius in any material substance whatever, but his renown has its source in the spirit of goodness itself, which must ever have higher issues than the noblest work of art. The unknown sculptor, wonderful as

his creation is, rose no higher than the sense of the beautiful and the true in relation to the human form. Rough as the work of the man referred to in the text appears to be, in the mere felling of trees, it reached the very depths, and at the same time rose to the sublimest heights of man's spiritual nature, for it was inseparably bound up with the glorious future that lies before the cause of God, in its fullest development in earth or in heaven. The marble may be broken up and crumble into dust, and every feature that genius has impressed upon it may pass away, but the influence and the record of true worth are eternal as the spirit of goodness itself, and like the word of the Lord must endure for ever. So shall it be with the memorial of this man.

The labours of other workers for God have received a similar recognition alike honourable in the annals of divine truth. In the Book of Nehemiah we have a long list of those devoted men, who in troublous times repaired the ruins of the city and the temple, and built up the broken wall, "before their own doors."

On turning to the letters of the apostle Paul, we find the names of many, both men and women, who greatly helped him in his work, and who on this account had a warm place in his heart. Those are no ordinary salutations which he sends to beloved brethren who had been his fellow-labourers in the kingdom of Christ.

If we regard the text as an epitaph on the tomb-stone of an old worthy, or as the divine acknowledg-

ment of his life-work, which might have been placed there, may we not take the same view of the Saviour's words, which He uttered at Bethany in commendation of the loving deed of Mary? Surely no words could have been more appropriately placed on her tomb, "She hath done what she could." Shall we regard this as her epitaph written by the hand of Jesus Himself? There it is in the words that flash upon us like a sunbeam from the sacred page, to be read in all ages and in all lands—"Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, this also that she hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her." In this noble tribute to departed worth we pass from the axe to the alabaster box. The one differs greatly from the other in outward appearance, but they were both devoted to the one Lord in the same spirit of love. The broken box of precious ointment showed the pure affection of a woman's heart, mellowed by divine grace. What intense devotion to the Master and His cause, what sympathy with Him in His sorrows, were shown in the simple deed which has invested the name of Mary with undying interest! The fragrance of that ointment has long since passed away on the evening breeze, but the Master's words shall never die. And why has she received such honourable mention in the sacred narrative? Because she did, in her sphere of life and up to the measure of her ability, "what she could" for Jesus and His cause.

Still carrying out the idea of an epitaph, come with me a little further on among the graves, where the

precious dust of ancient workers for God lies buried. Stay—let us bend over this tombstone for a while, for it is one at which we may well pause, and express our feelings of grateful remembrance of the dead. Many ages have passed away, but the name has not been effaced by the destroying finger of Time. There it stands, the name of a good woman who lived in the old sea-port of Joppa, and the inscription tells us :— "She was full of good works and alms-deeds which she did."

No one was better known amongst the poor of that town. Often was she seen going up and down its steep, narrow, crooked streets, entering the sorrow-stricken abodes of the widow and the orphan, and ministering by the bed-sides of the sick and the dying. She was a patient nurse, with a kind, motherly heart, apt in speaking a word in season. A woman whose presence was like a sunbeam in the sick-chamber, there was such gentleness in her touch, such lightness in her step, as she moved quietly about. "The law of kindness" was on her lips, sweet music in her voice, and winning gentleness in all her ways. Is not this the best medicine to a sick heart, to a weary, suffering frame, to a soul clouded with anxious thoughts and cares?

She sickens and dies, probably from some infectious disease, caught during one of her walks of mercy. Cast your thoughts back to that sad day in the old seaport, and let us enter the upper chamber in the house of mourning. Widows and orphans are standing *round the* dead body of one who did so much to

smooth their rugged path in life, by her cheering words and her deeds of true charity. Alas! she is dead; but the influence of her life will never die, and the evidence of her work will remain through all the ages, to encourage others to minister to the wants of the poor. The tokens of her busy hands and her loving heart were shown, with mingled feelings of pride, gratitude, and sorrow. What a subject for a painter! "All the widows stood by him weeping, and shewing the coats and garments which Dorcas made, while she was with them." Dead! No!

"To live in hearts we leave behind
Is not to die."

She lived in many grateful hearts in Joppa long after her death; she does so to this day. Her anniversary is still observed in the town where she lived, and where she was as an angel of mercy to the poor and the afflicted.

A touching incident in our own experience is connected with that day, which we can never recall without deep emotion. After leaving the desert, where we had suffered much from extreme heat and thirst, we came at last to the delightful orange groves around Joppa. No contrast could have been greater, no change more agreeable. The green foliage, with its grateful shade, the luscious fruit drooping from the overladen boughs on every side, made us feel in an entirely new world. But there was a still more pleasant surprise in store for us in this beautiful grove. When turning from one green lane into another long

avenue, where the golden fruit was still more abundant, we suddenly came upon a large group of women, dressed in white, seated round a fountain. It was a most impressive sight, and all the more so when we learned that the occasion of this remarkable gathering was in honour of Dorcas! By a happy coincidence we were now approaching the scene, hallowed by her name and by her good deeds, on the very day that is still set apart to commemorate these. The trees were planted so thickly around the fountain where the women were assembled, that in all likelihood we would have passed by without seeing them, but the hymn they sang drew us near to the spot, where time out of mind this annual celebration has taken place. The groves, so heavily laden with fruit, would have been in themselves a pleasant memory, but this unexpected meeting, so affecting in every way, as a simple touching tribute of respect to departed worth, has invested this scene forever, to our minds, with the most hallowed associations. Often has the remembrance of that day cheered us amid the wearing-out work of the city, and sent us back to it again, refreshed in spirit. "The righteous shall be in everlasting remembrance," and thus it is that the man with his axe, and Mary with her alabaster box of precious ointment, Dorcas with "the coats and garments which she made" for the poor widows; and many others of a kindred spirit, have found an imperishable place in the Word of God.

"The good abides, man dies. Die, too,
The toil, the fever, and the fret;

But the great thought—the upward view—
The good work done—these fail not yet!
From sire to son, from age to age,
Goes down the growing heritage."

4th. In the "Well done, thou good and faithful servant: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

His earthly fame lives in the text, and although there is nothing said of another world, may we not rest assured that his record is on high? His name, though unknown to us, shines in characters of light in the Lamb's book of life. He did his work for God in a loving spirit, and was called home when it was done to enter into his rest, and to receive his reward. The gloom of the forest was exchanged for the light of heaven, the axe for the palm of victory, and the dusty garments of hard toil for the spotless robe of righteousness. He wrought for the temple here, but whether he was permitted to see it brought to a glorious completion, and to enter it on that never-to-be-forgotten day when Solomon consecrated it to the service of Jehovah, we cannot tell; but may we not conclude, from the place he occupies in the sacred record, that he had an abundant entrance into the temple-home of the redeemed above? Rest and light came at eventide, and the welcome, after weary labour, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant!"

So will it be with all loving workers, who will continue faithful unto the end. "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them."

IV. *His life-lessons.*

Another glance at "our man" before we part. There he is plying his work with such force of will and earnest resolve, that the "thick trees" are falling before his sturdy strokes, and he has *cleared a space* around him in the deep forest. The light of heaven now falls on places from which it was shut out before. The cedars which he has brought to the ground are carried off, and prepared for the various parts which they are to occupy in the Temple. Some will be strong beams and pillars, and others will be beautifully carved, by the hand of cunning workmen, far superior, it may be, in genius and skill, to the woodman; but every cedar and every workman have their appropriate place and use in the Temple of God.

From the man with his axe we may all learn important lessons. He took the work which God laid to his hand, and the instrument which he could best wield. He lost no time in hesitation as to what he could do, or where he should begin, or in fruitless depreciation of himself or his ability. His trusty axe was at hand, and he laid hold of it for God. There were the thick trees, and he would bring them down for a noble purpose; he could try at least, and so he did. So may we all in the various spheres of life in which we have been placed. It matters not whether we work with the axe or the pen, with hand or with brain; given but the power of true faith, there will be work done, and that of a kind and to an extent that will surprise ourselves and others. We have all our *daily tasks*, and in doing them honestly and thoroughly

well, we are doing nobly for ourselves, for others, and for God, and thus the toils of every day may be pervaded by the Master's spirit, and lifted up to a higher level, far above the mere drudgery of life. In addition to this toil and moil for daily bread, there is special work for God that everyone of us may do, for both it and the instruments for doing it are laid to our hands, if we have but the willing mind to take them up. Everyone may help to *clear some space* around him from ignorance, and vice, and evil passions, by holy and resolute endeavours against his own besetting sins, his unmanly habits, his personal entanglements, that mar his usefulness and hinder his progress in the divine life. That surely is the work nearest his own door, and which is brought most pressingly before him. If any one sees no need for axe-work in the way of self-improvement, by cutting down and lopping off what should be removed, he is indeed blind to his own faults and failings.

As to church-work, he must be a very poor and profitless member indeed who can find nothing more to do than merely to give his presence at the weekly assembly on the Lord's day; who is only a hearer of the word, but not a doer. The state is one of passive indifference; he comes and he goes in a merely formal spirit of dull routine, or if he makes use of any weapon at all, he plays the part of the cold cynic, and the axe which he wields is that of constant fault-finding, by which he kills his own spiritual life and greatly injures that of others. The best cure for such a state of mind is to obey at once

the Saviour's injunction, "Go work in my vineyard." If this be done in a right spirit, humbling views of self will soon be obtained, and greater forbearance extended to the efforts of others. The most prosperous congregation is that in which there is a post for everyone, and everyone is found at his post.

Passing from this personal view of the work for Christ in our own hearts and in connection with His Church, let me remind you that you are all members of the general community, and as such should be deeply interested in its welfare, and ready to do your part in securing this. You are environed by many evils, and the word has gone forth from the righteous Judge, "Cut them down, why cumber they the ground?" Do not waste your strength by striking blindly and at random, and by fits and starts. Select your evil, as the man did with his thick tree, and keep at it till you have *cleared some space* around you. You may not all see as I do—I cannot expect that you should; but I do see one terrible evil towering above all the rest, and its doom has surely been pronounced in the word of God: "Woe unto him that giveth his neighbour drink; that puttest thy bottle to him, and makest him drunken also." Let everyone, in the spirit of true patriotism, Christian charity, and firm resolve, bring the axe of his own personal abstinence to help to cut down this upas-tree of intemperance, that is casting its baleful shadows all over the land. In God's name, and in the sacred interests of suffering humanity, cut it down!

When a terrible tragedy occurred in a Liverpool

theatre lately, on account of a panic, produced by some one who had most recklessly raised a false alarm of fire, the whole audience sprang to their feet, and rushed wildly to the doors. Everyone was like "a strong swimmer in his agony," fighting for dear life. One of the narrow passages was obstructed by a great beam of wood, and the door at the end could not be reached. The crowd pressed on, and what a struggle now ensued! Every moment added to the danger, some were already crushed to death. An axe was got somewhere, and a brave brawny arm was seen, striking over the heads of the densely-packed mass. The beam was knocked out of its place, a passage cleared to the door, and, by a desperate effort, though not without much loss of life, the crowd made their escape. All honour to the man who, by strength, courage, and presence of mind, cleared a way for the frantic crowd to the saving of their lives.

There are many beams to be cut down, and I know of none that so blocks the way of progress as our national curse. If others do not see it as I do, let them attack some other evil in faith and in prayer. "Cast ye up, cast ye up, prepare the way, take up the stumbling-block out of the way of my people." Would God that our working-men would *strike* against this evil! This would be the greatest blessing to themselves and to the whole nation. I call for a universal *strike* on the part of all, who love the Lord Jesus Christ, against our national vice.

Everyone to his work, and let it be work for God! All at it—always at it—at it with all your might!

The time is short, rest will come by-and-by; meantime, "whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might."

It was a supreme moment in the life of the blind man who sat by the wayside begging, nigh unto Jericho, when Jesus called him, that He might restore his sight. So eager was he to obey the call, that he threw aside his outer garment, rose at once, and hastened to the Master. Why throw aside his long, loose covering? Lest it might entangle his steps, and hinder him, even by a single moment, from coming into the presence of the Great Physician. So "let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us." Let us cut down everything that stands in the way between our souls and the blessings of salvation which Christ alone can give us. Whatever it be, spare it not, take it out of the way, for the highest interests of the soul are at stake. Down with it! even should it be as dear to you as life itself! "Whosoever will save his life, shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it."

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